

Calvinist Contact

CHRISTMAS 1987

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December 4, 1987 / 43rd year of publication / No. 2086



*"A shoot will come up
from the stump of
Jesse;
from his roots a Branch
will bear fruit."*

(ISAIAH 11:1)

G. LANGBROEK

Calvinist Contact

Head office: 261 Martindale Rd., Unit 4, St. Catharines, ON L2R 6P9; phone: (416) 682-8311.
Office hours: 8:15 - 4:15 p.m.

Calvinist Contact (ISSN 0410-3882) is an independent, Christian weekly, serving the broader Reformed community with news, ideas and opportunities for contact. It supports and encourages every endeavour that seeks to proclaim the Kingship of Jesus Christ.

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Canada mail: Second class mail registration #0451.

Postage paid at St. Catharines, Ontario. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Calvinist Contact*, 261 Martindale Rd., Unit 4, St. Catharines, ON L2R 6P9.

U.S. mail: *Calvinist Contact* (USPS 518-090), published weekly except for July 31, Aug. 7, Sept. 4, 11 and Dec. 25, by Calvinist Contact Publishing Limited, 261 Martindale Rd., Unit 4, St. Catharines, ON L2R 6P9. Second class postage paid at Lewiston, NY 14092. Send address changes to *Calvinist Contact*, Box 110, Lewiston, NY 14092.

Advertising: Display advertising deadline is Wednesday at 8:30 a.m. of the preceding week. Classified advertising deadline is Thurs. 8:30 a.m. for the next week's issue. See events page for rates.

The publication of comments, opinions, or advertising does not imply agreement or endorsement by either *Calvinist Contact* or Calvinist Contact Publishing Limited.

Printed in Canada.

Subscriptions:	Canada	United States
Six months	\$15.00	\$13.50 U.S.
One year	\$25.00	\$22.50 U.S.
Two years	\$47.50	\$42.50 U.S.
Three years	\$70.00	\$62.50 U.S.
Overseas:	\$100.00 airmail	\$45.00 surface mail

Editorial

A shoot from the stump of Jesse

Artist George Langbroek of St. Catharines has designed the front cover for this Christmas issue. It's really an Advent cover, based on the familiar prophesy of Isaiah 11:1: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit."

Advent texts are a lot of fun for us who live in a year of our Lord instead of in a year of Adam and Eve. We know how the prophesy turned out! The shoot has become a tree in its own right. And the fruit which this Branch will bear — well, that's us. Did you ever think of yourself as an Isaiah 11 berry?

You can tell that George, too, had a lot of fun with this text. He makes sure that we get the idea sharply etched into our flabby minds that this shoot was unexpected.

The text speaks of a stump. A stump is what's left of a tree after someone calls "timberrrr." The Lord called out "timberrr" after he chopped down the royal-pain-in-his-neck House of David. Whoomph! At the river of Babylon, we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the willows (which had not been chopped down) we hung our harps.

We hung them up, that is, until we heard about that shoot coming up from Jesse's stump. The stump is the remnant of Israel, of David's house. Out of the roots of that stump came Jesus, the messianic King.

But George Langbroek got a little annoyed at this point. So the stump thinks it can bring forth a shoot out of its own root system, does it? Some trees, especially willows, manage to do that quite nicely. (No wonder the Israelites in exile could find a place to hang

their harps.) But the remnant of Israel was deadlier than a doornail. It couldn't produce a new tree if it diverted all of River Jordan for irrigation. So, George used a piece of driftwood to be his stump of Jesse.

Well, everyone knows that a piece of driftwood cannot be replanted and cannot possibly produce a green twig. All the life has been leached out of it by water and sunshine.

The miracle of Isaiah 11 verse one is that God can bring forth a tender shoot from a piece of drifting Israel. Kind of stumps you, doesn't it?

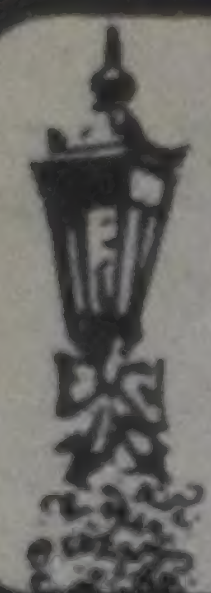
This miracle of green-twig grace did not come cheaply. Langbroek hints at the cost in the faint image of a crucified Christ in the right part of the stump.

Christmas is the unexplained, certainly undeserved, gift of hope in a dimly dark world. It's the sudden burst of light at the end of your tunnel that echoes with whys? and whens?

Even though you know the outcome of this prophesy, perhaps you have a difficult time reliving the excitement of anticipation. Your life is largely unfulfilled, and you don't know the outcome of your present crisis. You understand the imagery of stumps. Do you also understand the imagery of a shoot?

A shoot has come up from the stump of Jesse. And because Jesus, the Saviour, was born in royal David's city, your stump of a life, ingrafted with Christ, can bear fruit again. If your harp is hanging up on the willows, do you dare reach for it again?

BW



The Christmas calves

Hilda J. Born

Christmas, in my childhood during the Depression, was not gift laden. Although my parents tried hard to give us a special day, my imagination always surpassed the size of their pocketbooks. And besides, we always had to wait to see our gifts until Dad came in from chores. To prevent peeking, Mom covered the plates of treats and modest gifts with bleached sugar-sack tea towels. Early in my youth, I resolved to improve on this Christmas ritual.

After Jake and I married, and the children came along, we began our own Christmas traditions. First, we didn't wait till the cold Christmas morning for gift opening. We did it on Christmas Eve. That way, my dairyman husband wouldn't miss the expressions on the children's faces when they opened their gifts. The children were spared one night's wait.

But despite our hard work and careful planning, we found ourselves in similar financial straits to that of our parents when we were young. Every year, on December first, the large farm payment was due. This we managed to pay, as well as our missionary pledge and church obligations. But that was it. Very little was left for us as Christmas approached.

I sewed nice outfits for the children, and taught them carols and recitations.

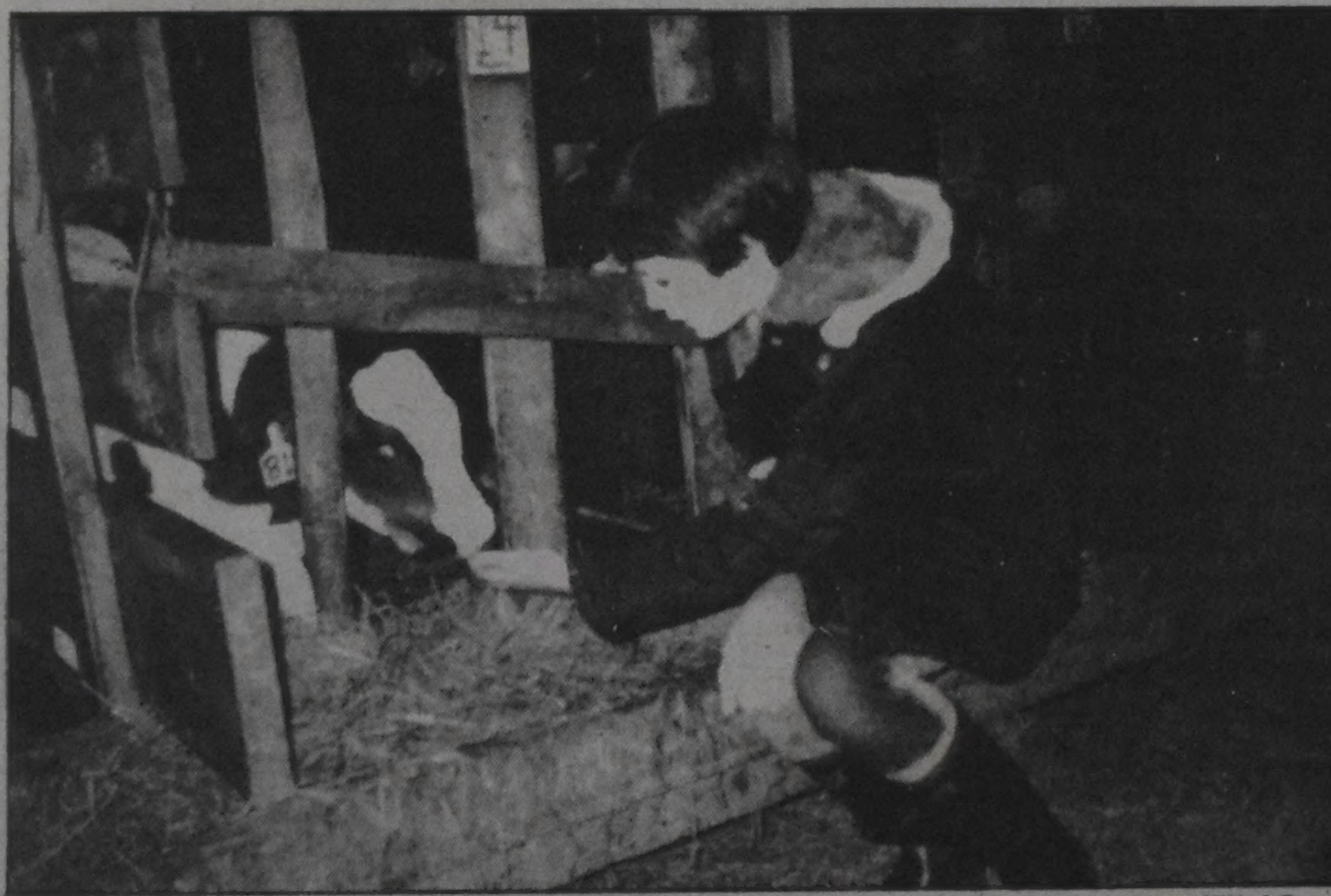


Photo: Hilda J. Born

Photo taken at the dairy farm in Matsqui, British Columbia.

Together we baked festive cookies. But what to do about presents? I pondered and prayed.

Finally, the week before Christmas arrived and all we had was five dollars. With this in my purse, I dejectedly went from store to store in Abbotsford. How could I possibly buy happiness for five children with only five dollars?

I was angry for being put into such an impossible situation. Fortunately, snow was flying, so people were walking by in

a hurry. For this I was thankful: at least nobody would notice the tears of frustration in my eyes.

I thought of buying a game, but what game could please both a two-year-old and a 12-year-old? Then I saw a girl's red sweater for \$2.50. I bought it for Teresa. Since the little boys would be happy with any bright moving toy, I spent the other \$2.50 for them. Then, I sadly and slowly drove home. There was nothing for David and Johnnie, the two

older boys.

My husband, Jake, tried to console me by saying, "We'll promise them something nice as soon as we can afford it." But I knew the aching disappointment this would be for our budding teenagers.

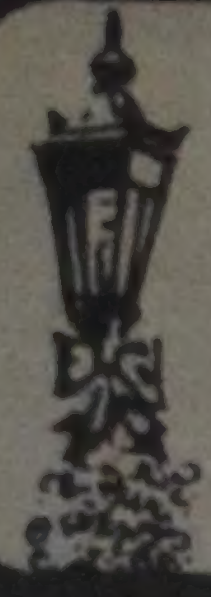
Eagerly, the children awakened on the 24th. After the Christmas Eve service, it would be time to unwrap their hoped-for surprises. I tried not to dampen their joy, even though I knew we still needed two gifts.

At last, Jake came in for breakfast. But before sitting down, he took me aside to whisper in my ear, "Two new bull calves were born during the night and I've just decided to give one to each of the big boys." Relieved, I agreed.

David and Johnnie liked their Christmas calves. For about six weeks they carefully tended them in preparation for market. Happily, the price at the auction was good that week, and each boy got \$35. They were pleased. Jake and I marvelled at the Lord's timing.

Although I still carefully plan for Christmas happiness each year, I know it only happens when the Lord puts life into our celebration of his birth.

Hilda Born recorded this event for us from Matsqui, British Columbia.



Steve

Ineke Brouwer-Parlevliet

His face haunted me: the large, sad eyes, the hollow cheeks and the sleek, blond hair made him seem so much younger than his 17 years. His skinny, small-framed body was wracked by anorexia and in spite of his street- and world-wisdom, he looked so vulnerable, so fragile and forlorn that an overwhelming feeling of compassion engraved him in my mind.

Steve is his name. He was one of the thousands of children and teenagers whose home is the street and whose only family are the buddies he meets while looking for food and shelter — and probably drugs.

They live in the big cities (and not so big cities) of our affluent society, from one end of our country to the other. Last September, the CBC, during its six o'clock "TV" newscast, brought their plight and misery "right" into my comfortable living room.

There was that young girl, scantily dressed, with tattooed butterflies disfiguring parts of her slim body. When interviewed, she shrugged her shoulders and said matter-of-factly, "You got to take life as it comes. You can't do a thing about it." Did she really not care or was she hiding the fact that she had lost all hope for a better future, I wondered.

Another girl was working in a bar, her age concealed by heavy make-up. She admitted that she was prostituting herself to make a living. Perhaps for her pimp as well? She didn't say.

There were so many of them "I know I'll die," one of them said, shooting heroin right into her jugular vein. "What's the difference if it is sooner or later? I've nothing else to live for. And I'm too far gone, anyhow."

The camera moved to a neat-looking teenaged boy, who was scanning the newspaper for a cheap place to live. But there are no cheap places to live in our big cities. Yet he tried, making phone call after phone call. All in vain.

Besides, how could he ever come up with the first and last month's rent if he didn't even have a week's rent? Night was falling. Defeated, he slowly started to climb the backstairs of a dilapidated building to its flat roof where he would sleep that night again, curled up under an old blanket.

★★★★

The camera went from Montreal to Toronto to Vancouver, but it always came back to Halifax where Steve had been roaming the streets since he was 12 years old. I tried to imagine what it would be like to search for food and shelter, day after day, for more than five years in a row. I just couldn't.

Steve had no idea where his parents were. "They moved away so long ago," he said. I detected the longing in his voice. The hospital kept track of him in an attempt to treat his illness. "They are kind to me," Steve said, "but, of course, I can't stay there." And so Steve remained on the street.

Why are these children homeless and often parentless? The answers differed. Some had rebelled against loving parents and a good home, others were kicked out or had run away because of physical, mental, and yes, sexual abuse. As one boy said, "Life on the street is hundreds times better than living in the hell which was called home."



"Steve is his name. He was one of the thousands of children and teenagers whose home is the street and whose only family are the buddies he meets while looking for food and shelter — and probably drugs."

Photo: UNESCO

That night I had a hard time falling asleep. My thoughts kept circling around these wayward teenagers, who were not only exposed to, but involved as well, in crime, drugs, prostitution and abuse. They seemed so lost, so without hope for a better life and future.

I started to pray for them. The only one I knew by name was Steve. Especially he was foremost in my prayers and thoughts from that day on. I had a great desire to go to Halifax, to look for him and then to take him home with me. But I could not. So I prayed night after night that someone else would reach out to him in love, give him a home and a family and would tell him about our loving Father in heaven.

Often we say to each other when a need arises: "All we can do is hope and pray," as if prayer is the very last resort. But I have learned differently. Prayer is tapping into God's power line and the results are often mind boggling. While I kept praying for Steve, I knew deep in my heart that God wouldn't leave this pathetic boy to his fate, as there is no such thing as fate. Instead, there is faith. Although I realized that I would never find out what would become of Steve, I trusted God and put Steve into his care.

The weeks and months went by. Then, just the other day, for the umpteenth time in my life God answered my prayers beyond my expectations.

The children and I were raking the

leaves on our lawn, making use of the last nice fall day, because a sudden and sharp drop in temperature was predicted. It was six o'clock now and getting dark, but piles of leaves, like miniature mountaintops, still have to be stuffed into garbage bags before night.

Just forget the six o'clock news this time, I told myself, since I usually try to watch on Channel 5. Yes, keep on raking, I decided. It'll be the same old stuff about free trade and the stock market crash all over again. Besides, the whole stock market business was Greek to me. Yet, some minutes later I felt a sudden urge to watch the news anyway, and went inside.

Switching on the TV I heard Hillary Brown announce the next news item. My heart skipped a beat when a moment later, the familiar face of Steve appeared on the screen: The same sad eyes were looking at me, like two months ago. Other flashbacks of the September broadcast followed. Fascinated, I watched. There was Steve again, sitting at the table, neatly dressed and opening letters from all over the country — letters with kind, encouraging words, with money, with offers to become a member of the sender's family.

Looking right into the camera, Steve smiled a shy, warm smile. "I can't believe it," he whispered, "all these people who care for me"

He was living now with a lady who had taken him in for the time being and

he was working hard to finish his education with the help of a tutor.

"Are you going to live with one of these families who would like to take you in?" the reporter asked Steve.

Shaking his head, he replied, "Not right away. You see, I hope to find my own parents before Christmas."

I don't remember a thing of the rest of the news. My heart was filled with thankfulness and joy. God had not only heard our prayers for Steve — for I was sure that many others had prayed for him as well — but He also had let me know in a very visible way that He indeed was looking after Steve.

I keep on praying for Steve, that one day, before Christmas, he may find his own parents. But even more, that he may get to know the Christmas child as his Saviour. I believe that some day he will. God always completes what He has begun and in my heart I hear God calling Steve's name.

Ineke Brouwer-Parlevliet lives in Niagara Falls, Ontario.



Laughter in the aula Frank Sawyer

Usually I enjoy the Christmas season, the snow, the candles, the festivity. Especially the tinsel and turkey. What I mean is, I used to when we lived up North. Down here in the tropics you almost forget if it is July or December. The only snow I see is in the freezer. I decidedly miss the light refracting on icicles, like you are probably enjoying right now as you sit down to read before an open hearth. Or more likely these days, you are stretched out on a rug before the woodburner, which since the energy crisis has done a come-back.

Energy crisis? That's a laugh when you live down here. It's also a cry. OK, so we all go through some culture shock. Do you rub shoulders with peasants that call themselves lucky when they can earn three dollars a day?

In any case, in spite of what happened, I still defend our country. Especially at Christmas time.

See, my colleague's name is Douglas. They call him Doug, of course, but I will always think of *dug* as related to dig. Always digging, see. He just walks in with his crooked, Canuck smile and says: "What country had 80 *caudillo* presidents in a 50-year span in the 1800s?" Or: "Where do we find 47 per cent illiteracy and an even higher percentage of malnutrition?"

Of course he wants me to guess it's Honduras. But surely it is perverse to dig like that. When I saw those Iran-Contra trials on TV I was proud of ... but, you know, this really steams me, because Doug starts digging and says, "Something sure ran contra, all right!" Subtle jokes like that.

Well, one day I decided to try to meet Doug on his own terms. Having pondered quite long on some liberation movements in Latin America, I remarked as casually as I could while we grouped around the coffee pot, "The base community movement is getting grassroots action going." I thought this to be a winning phrase.

"The only bases I see are loaded. Military bases," Doug replied. Just like that. Not angry. Just so innocent and perverse. So I have to watch every word I use. Would you enjoy that?

And then those stories. Here we are, a few friends sitting down to fried chicken; I mean very deep fried, since that will kill the tropical amoebas, and Douglas starts a story.

"Marisol was a little girl who lived in a mud hut with a banana-leaf roof on the north coast of Honduras" It is always Marisol. Same name, different story.

"Marisol lived ... etc. ... where the Caribbean sea tosses white sand" Another contention, because he says CaribBEan, and I say CaRIBbean. Different accent, see. "... Tosses white sand under coconut fronds. Marisol says, 'What is there beyond the sea, Mama?' 'Oh, far across the sea is gringolandia with big houses and cars and coloured television.'"

"But one day Marisol's father does not come back in his dugout canoe because the waves have grown large and dangerous in the wind. The next year when Marisol is nine she moves to the big city of Tegucigalpa, travelling hours in a bus on the long road that never ends. Now she lives in a shanty slum."

I haven't figured out what Doug is trying to say with that one, but I suspect that it has to do with moving farther away from gringolandia, even if you live



Photo: Frank Sawyer

Christmas in Honduras is not the same.

in a slum. But isn't that perverse?

Then he has this other Marisol story. And I've caught on to the name: see, Marisol is really *mar y sol*, sea and sun, in Spanish. If he could just stick to the romantics and not get so political, it would all be a lot easier.

"Marisol is a 16-year-old girl who escapes Nicaragua during the revolution. Her mother is rich so they leave, but the daughter is a Sandinista supporter."

You see, same garbage.

"They move to Peachland, B.C., Canada. That is about the smallest lakeside dock you can think of, where they launch little white sailboats into the mountain lake. Marisol stands on the wharf speaking English with a beautiful Spanish accent."

You notice which of the two languages gets the compliment, huh? "Marisol says, 'Some Marxists are not communists.'"

Same perversity. What makes it all so ridiculous is that she keeps throwing pebbles into the lake. It is evening and the moon is clear. What makes it so

subtle is that the moon rests on a different angle in the tropics. I mean you see more of the under rim, instead of just the side slice, like up north.

"The moon smiles over Managua, says Marisol."

"Plop. A pebble in the lake."

"Plip, plop."

"Not all Marxists are communists. Plop. Plip, plip."

"When my brother looks at the moon in Managua, he sees the same one we do, only it smiles."

What can you say to all that? So you will understand what happened. When I saw Doug that morning he says, "Where is there 20 per cent unemployment and another 40 per cent subemployment?"

Well, *you* know where he means and I know where he means. I just grinned and kept the peace.

But when I got into class, a student who is getting too much like Douglas says, "Which country put the first Somoza in power? And why should President Roosevelt say, 'He's a s.o.b.' but at least he is *ours* s.o.b.' If he were

that bad, why would we want him down there in Nicaragua?"

Shut up, you leftist. That is what I wanted to say. But I stayed Christian. Yet I do want to be honest and tell you that I have heard before that Roosevelt said that about Somoza back in 1934 or so. What to say now?

"You know the facts have to be interpreted," I said. Unfortunately I think I got that line from Douglas. The student says: "How do you interpret the lack of land division?"

And then I remembered how on the first day of class a student had cheeped, "Welcome to the *jaula*." You see, *jaula* is jail, but *aula* is classroom.

Land division. Before I could reply, this student says, "Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you." "I'm sick of that Marxist crap," I said as I erased the board.

It was silent. Then suddenly someone guffawed. There followed a big deep bellylaugh. "That wasn't Marx, that was James I was quoting, Sir. *Saint* James, chapter five." I still hear that guffaw followed by rolling laughter when I try to sleep at night.

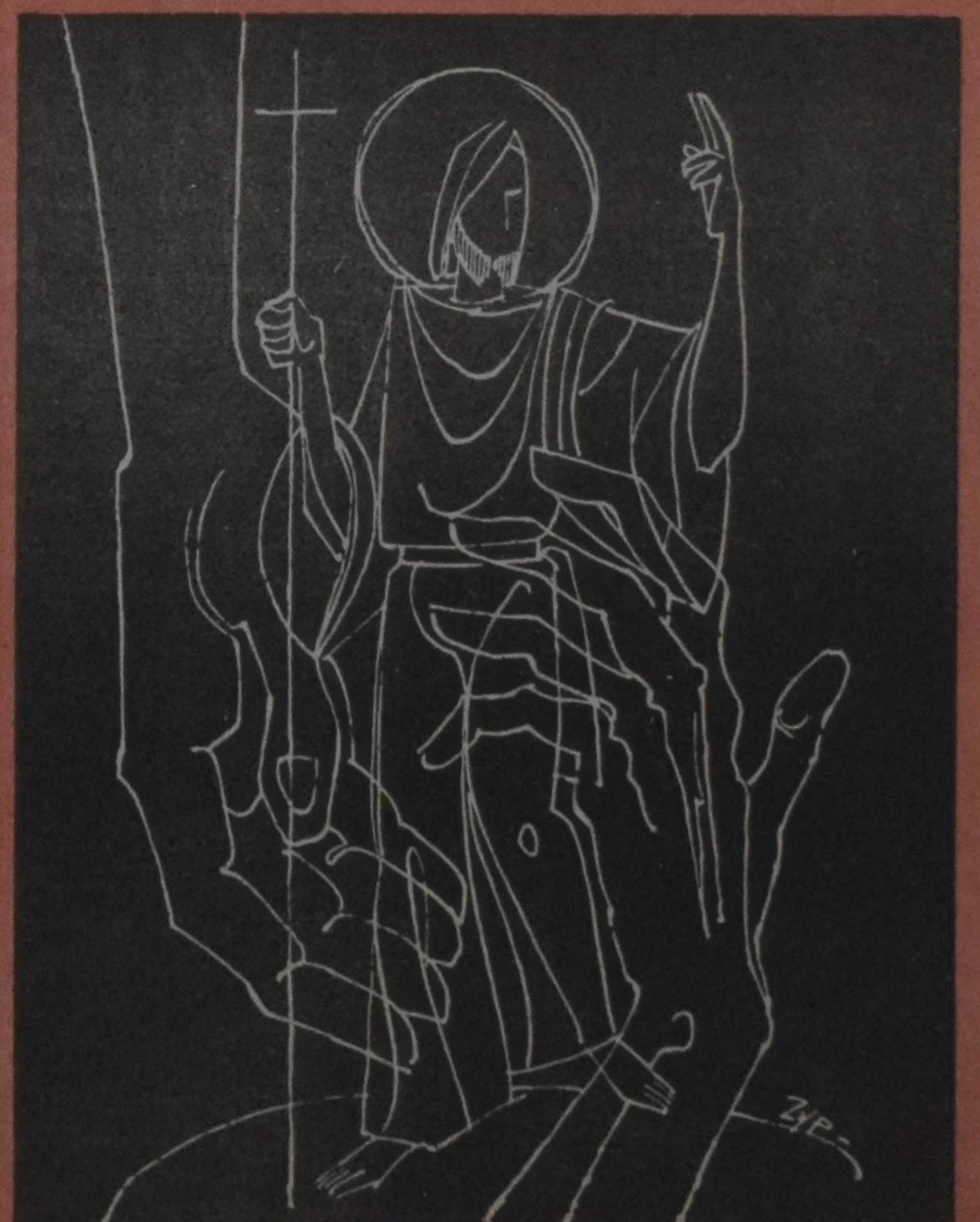
Usually I enjoy the Christmas season. Especially the turkey. I've nothing against a little mistletoe. But if leftists can quote James, maybe Luther was right about the canonicity question. Somewhere something is wrong.

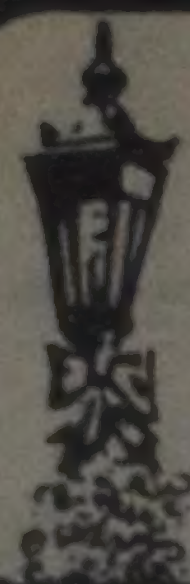
Frank Sawyer is a missionary in Honduras for the Christian Reformed Church.

*Christ is born again.
Not in some stable,
Distant in time and place,
But Christ is reborn in us
Each moment we respond
To his old command:
Love your neighbour,
Stop the flow of human tears,
Heal the wounds
Of the family of man,
Recognize in others
The Christ being born ...*

Henricus Zyp

(Reprinted with permission from Change for Children Association of Alberta)





Poetry

Joy to the world, the Lord has come,
We sing aloud these days,
And thank the Lord for what He's done,
For his amazing grace.

But, when we take a look around
In this world as it is,
We wonder, out aloud at times:
Has something gone amiss?
That peace and joy, as angels told
The shepherds long ago,
In Beth'lem's fields, in days of old,
Is that still really so?
It looks, that peace has gone astray
And joy, at times, seems far away.

Again this year is near its end.
What did it bring? What did it send
To us, God's creatures here below?
Was it all joy? We must say: No.
This year too, we saw war and strife.
How many people lost their life
Through hunger and calamities?
Instead of joy, it's tears one sees.
How many thousands are there still
In concentration camps? Who will
Help them and give them freedom? Who
Will stop the terrorists, that do
Their deeds of horror everywhere?
Joy to this world? It's just not there.

Joy to the world, at Christmas time

And close to home, we also see
No joy. Where loved ones used to be,
An empty place is all that's there.
Then, there's the broken homes too, where
A marriage failed and fell apart.
Where children cry. Then, it's so hard
To sing: Joy to the world. How can we bring
That tiding glad to those that mourn?
The tiding that a Child is born?

And yet, we may. We still can sing
This Christmas time, and let it ring
Aloud to all: The Lord is king.
He gave his Son, that we may live
Forever. For that we must give
Thanks to the Father, to the Son,
The Spirit, who for us has won
The vict'ry: Everlasting life,
An end to all our earthly strife
And sorrow. For that baby came
To us at Christmas and his name
Means Prince of Peace and Wonderful.
His government will embrace all,
He shall be King on David's throne.
Our Lord, our Saviour, He alone
Can make this world a happy place,
Through his unfathomable grace.



Illustration: Family Circle

Now, can we sing that happy song
That all of us have known so long
Already? Can we raise our voice
In triumph, over all the noise
Of war, of hardships all around?
Yes. We can sing. Yes, we may sound
Aloud his praise, with mouth and heart.
For us as well, Christ did depart
From heaven. To this earth He came
To save all his from sin and shame.
So, altogether, let us sing
His praise. Let loud our voices ring:
Joy to the World. The Lord IS King.

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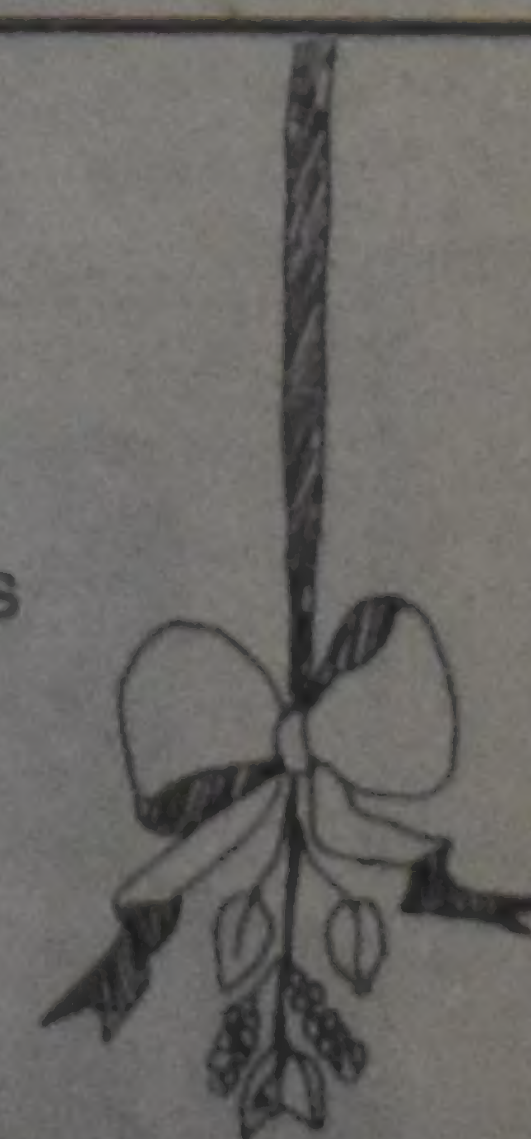
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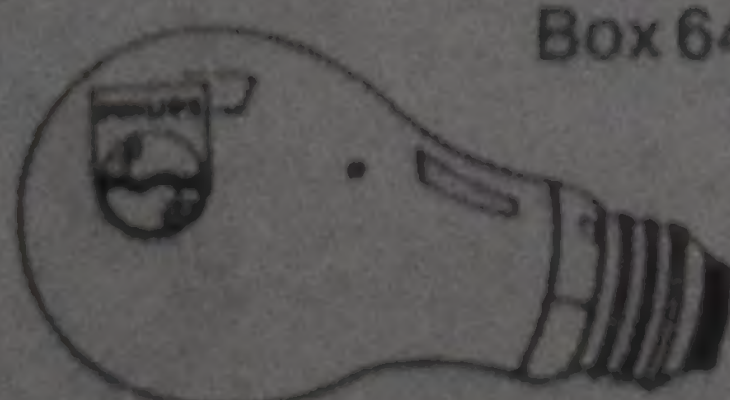
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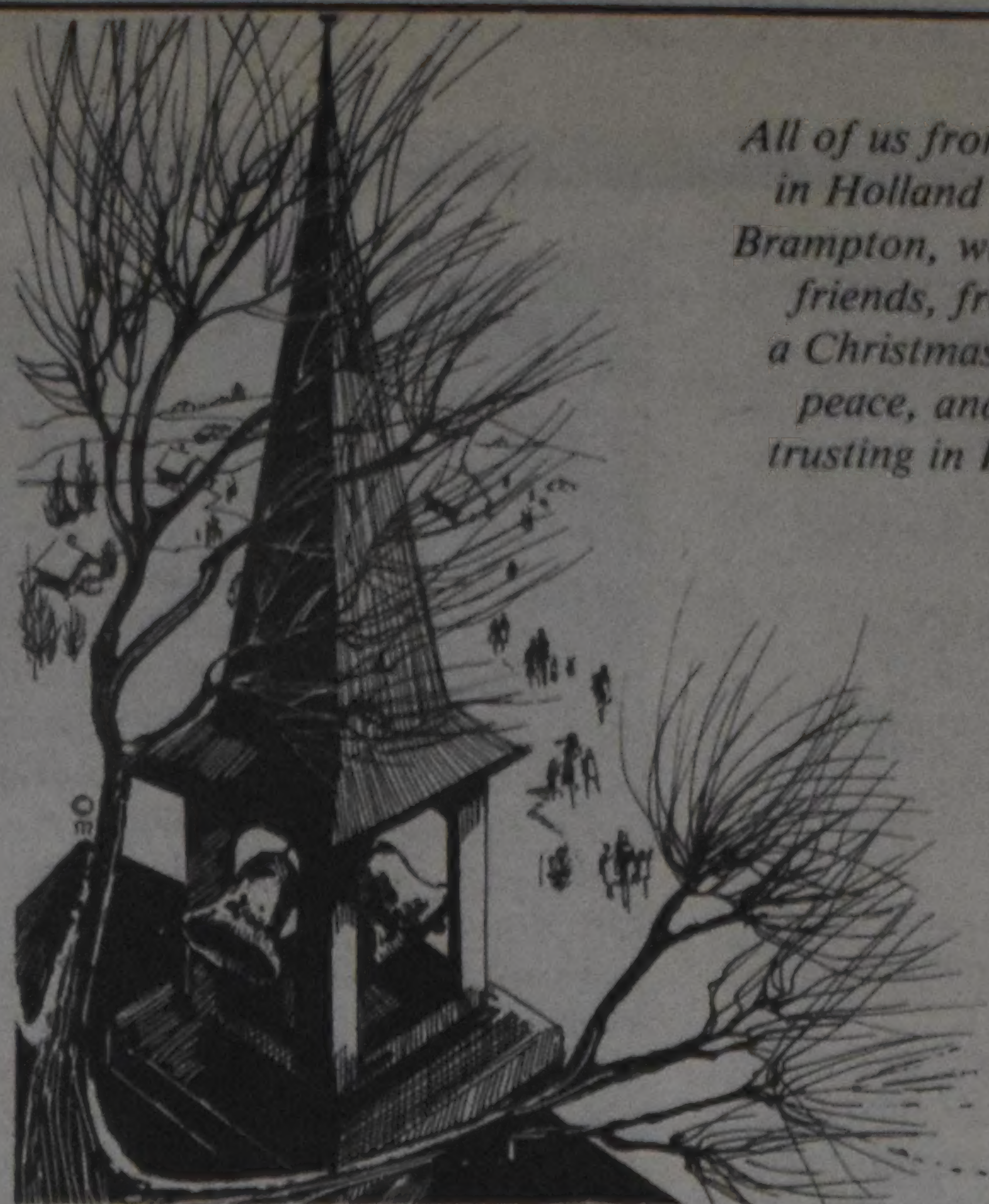
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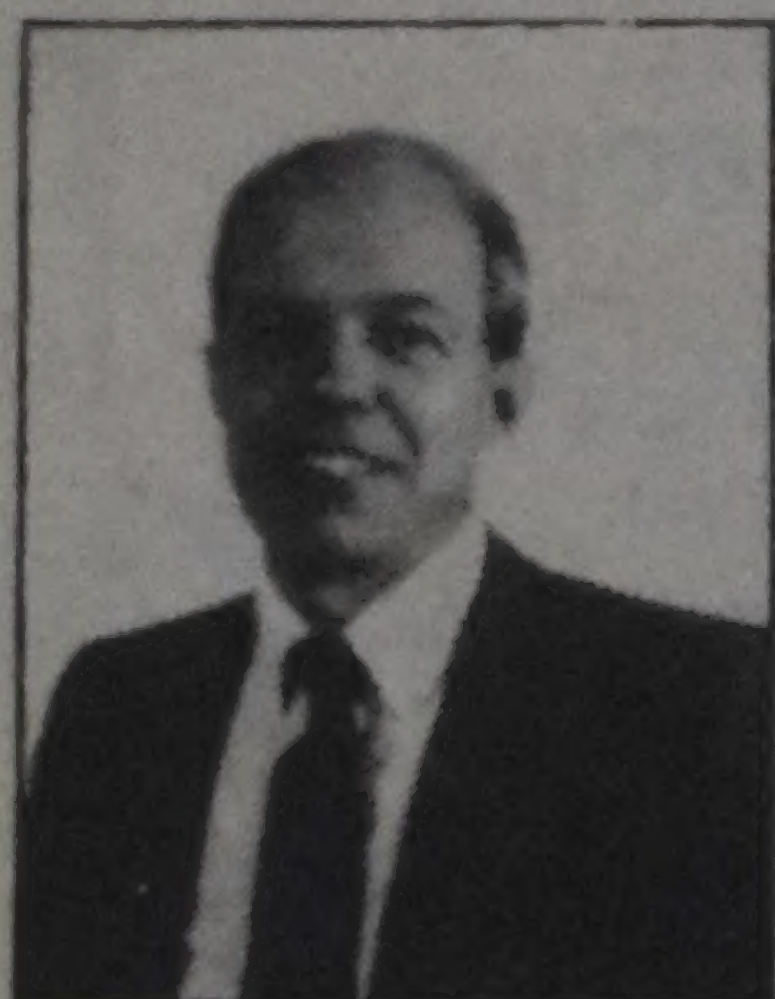
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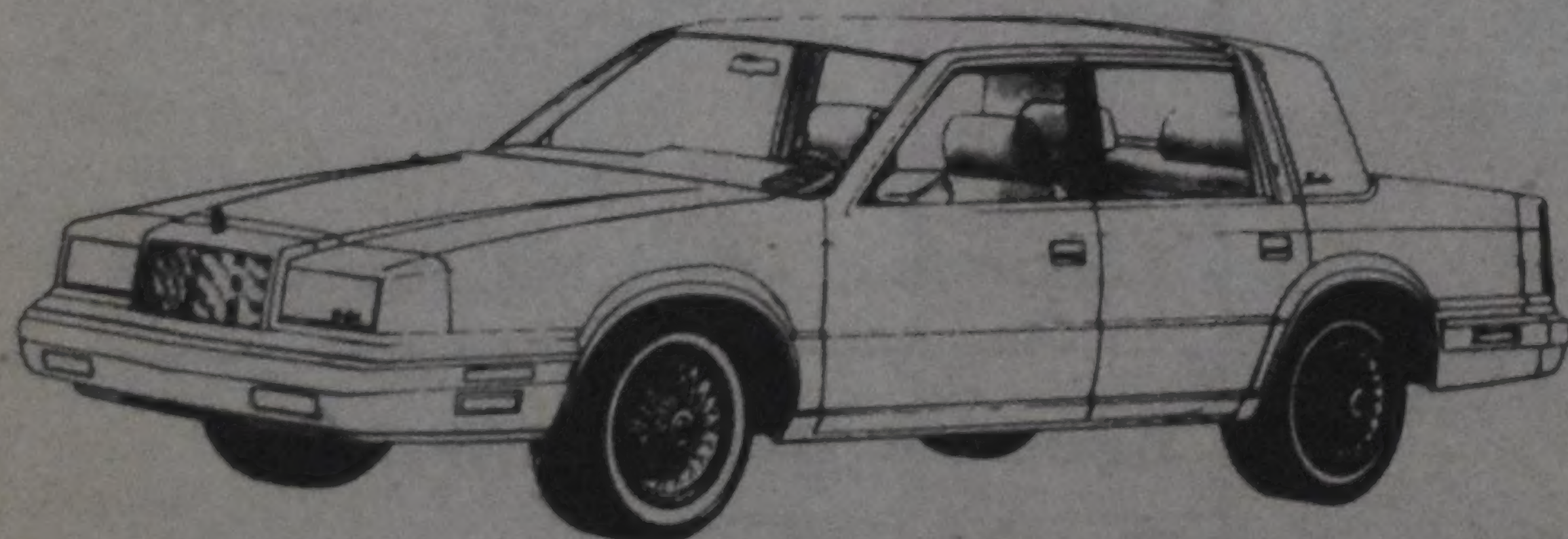
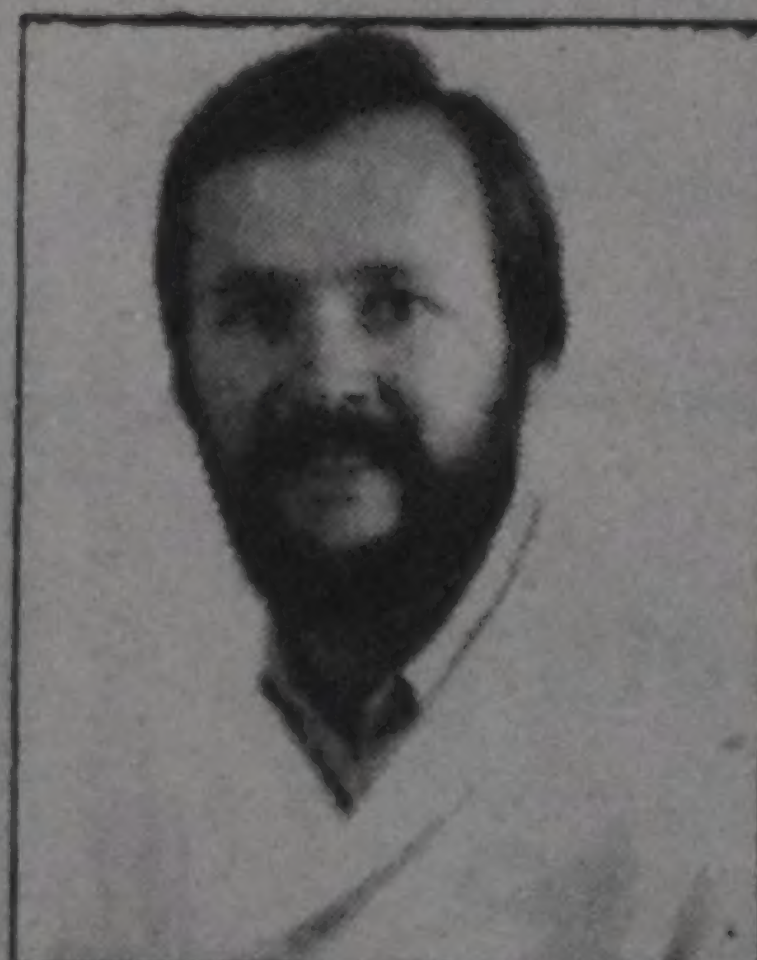
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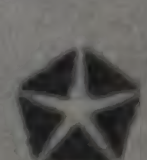
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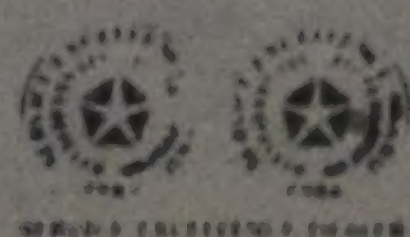


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Her small corner

Berta Hosmar

Smoothly, the Handi Transit van edged into the designated parking spot in front of the nursing home, which, in the pouring rain, still managed to look attractive with its many colourful Christmas lights.

"All finished for another week?" inquired the middle-aged woman in the wheelchair, as the driver carefully opened the sliding doors and lowered the lift. "Yes, Ellen. How I love Fridays," was the cheerful reply. Skilfully the young man manoeuvred wheelchair and Ellen around a few cars to the front door.

"I can do that myself, but thanks anyway," Ellen reminded him, as she instinctively bent her head as if trying to avoid getting drenched.

"Well, have a good weekend!" shouted the driver, running back to his vehicle, after having pushed his load through the open doors into the lobby.

"You too," mumbled Ellen, as she pushed a button with her left hand and smoothly rode to her room.

She could start preparing herself for next Monday's lectures, she reflected, but why not wait till tomorrow. Saturdays and Sundays lasted forever in this place if you had nothing to occupy your mind. A year of living here had taught her that. Besides, she was tired. Teaching four days a week at the local community college took a lot out of her. But she knew she was lucky, having this job. It kept her from giving in to total despair.

★★★★

"We can't let your excellent mind go to waste just because of this car accident," her supervisor had said while visiting her in the hospital. "Just get well as quickly as you can Ellen. You were one of our best social workers; I know you will be one of our best instructors."

"Bless her," Ellen thought. The idea of not being totally useless in the future had kept her sane when it became clear that the paralysis of the lower part of her body and her right arm was permanent.

It was almost three years later now, and slowly she had tried to pick up the pieces of her life — her life, which seemed so predictable now; so predictable and so dull. Her room, furnished with her own things, awaited her every night after school. Her meals were served in the dining room, at a table where only the residents who were physically but not mentally impaired, ate. This particular nursing home believed in segregation "to keep up the morale of our intellectuals," as the supervisor had jokingly told them. Plenty of time to mix with the confused or senile residents after meals, if you so desired, but dinner talk should be stimulating for those who lived here because of physical limitations or old age.

"He has a point," Ellen had admitted to herself when she had seen some of the drooling, confused residents.

After the evening meal she might get a visitor from her local church, or Jeff might drop in; and there were always her books and the television if she had no more work to do for school.

She had to admit that people had gone out of their way to make her comfortable — the computer in her room, the aides who helped her during lunch hour at school, the organized trips in the Handi Transit to special events. Everyday was just wonderful and her

many friends had not deserted her, at least not yet. Too bad the children lived so far away, but that was perhaps a blessing in disguise. They lived their own lives now as adults, and that was as it should be. She did not want to be a burden to them. They gave her more than enough love when they came, and their visits were highlights.

She did not want to be a burden to Jeff, either. She had told him so, repeatedly, right after the accident when she was still in the hospital. But then Jeff had taken her paralyzed hand in his strong ones and reassured her that they were in this thing together. "You'll come home, Elly, and even if you should not fully recover, we can always adapt the house and get some extra help. Things will be OK. God will help us," he had promised, hiding his own tears.

But that was three years ago. He called her "Elly," when he felt tender towards her. Now it was always "Ellen."

When had she first noticed the change in him? An absent-minded look in his

eyes when he came to visit her in the hospital, a reluctance to tell her about himself, a certain coolness. Oh, it had happened so slowly, and she could understand. Yes she could... if it had happened to another man and not to Jeff, her own husband.

In her work she had met with so much marital misery. Why should she be upset with Jeff now that it had hit home and she could do nothing to prevent it? But Jeff was a Christian, wasn't he? They both believed in marital faithfulness, for better, for worse, in sickness and in health.

Yes, she knew it was an impossible life for Jeff. Coming home to an empty house every night, visiting her, week after week, month after month, and then slowly realizing she would need nursing care for the rest of her life, and would never be again the sports-loving, active wife he had known. He was only 47. How many years would he have to live alone, with a wife stuck in a nursing home? They had looked at all kinds of possibilities, but this home was the best solution so far.

But Jeff's body still obeyed his commands. He could come and go as he

pleased, Ellen would tell herself, as she struggled with her own grief as well as Jeff's. She prayed for strength for them both. Jeff did not come so often anymore, and she knew now that she was losing him, most likely to another woman. It was hard to talk to him; he was moody and irritable lately, and always in a hurry to leave. She had felt deep compassion for him at times, but also a burning anger, and when she had noticed the pitying glances of her friends, and their reluctance to talk about Jeff, she knew that soon Jeff would tell her what he had been trying to hide.

Tears welled up in Ellen's eyes, and she brought her left fist to her mouth and bit her knuckles to keep from crying out loud. "God!" she cried silently, "Help me and comfort me, or I'll go under in my despair." She knew she was giving in to self-pity again. She still had much that others in this building lacked. But today everything seemed so dark again, so hopeless, and the pouring rain did not help either.

She got a hold of herself. No sense giving in to her black mood. Her heart once more cried out to God, who seemed so far away, yet loved her as her intellect told her, although her heart protested. It was so easy to believe when all went well. How superficial had her faith life often been when she was so busy raising her family and pursuing her career. How little time she had taken to nurture her faith. She, on whom others had depended, was now totally dependent on them. She was physically helpless, and her marriage was in jeopardy.

Was she supposed to praise God for adversity, as a minister had said on television? "Thank God when He loves you enough to take away from you what stands between him and you," he had said. Strange how healthy people often knew all the answers, she thought wryly. She had been no different when she was well, and perhaps that minister was right. What did she know about his circumstances?

"God, please give me a sign, show me you can still use me. Let me feel your love once again, or I'm afraid I'll stop trying," she prayed fervently.

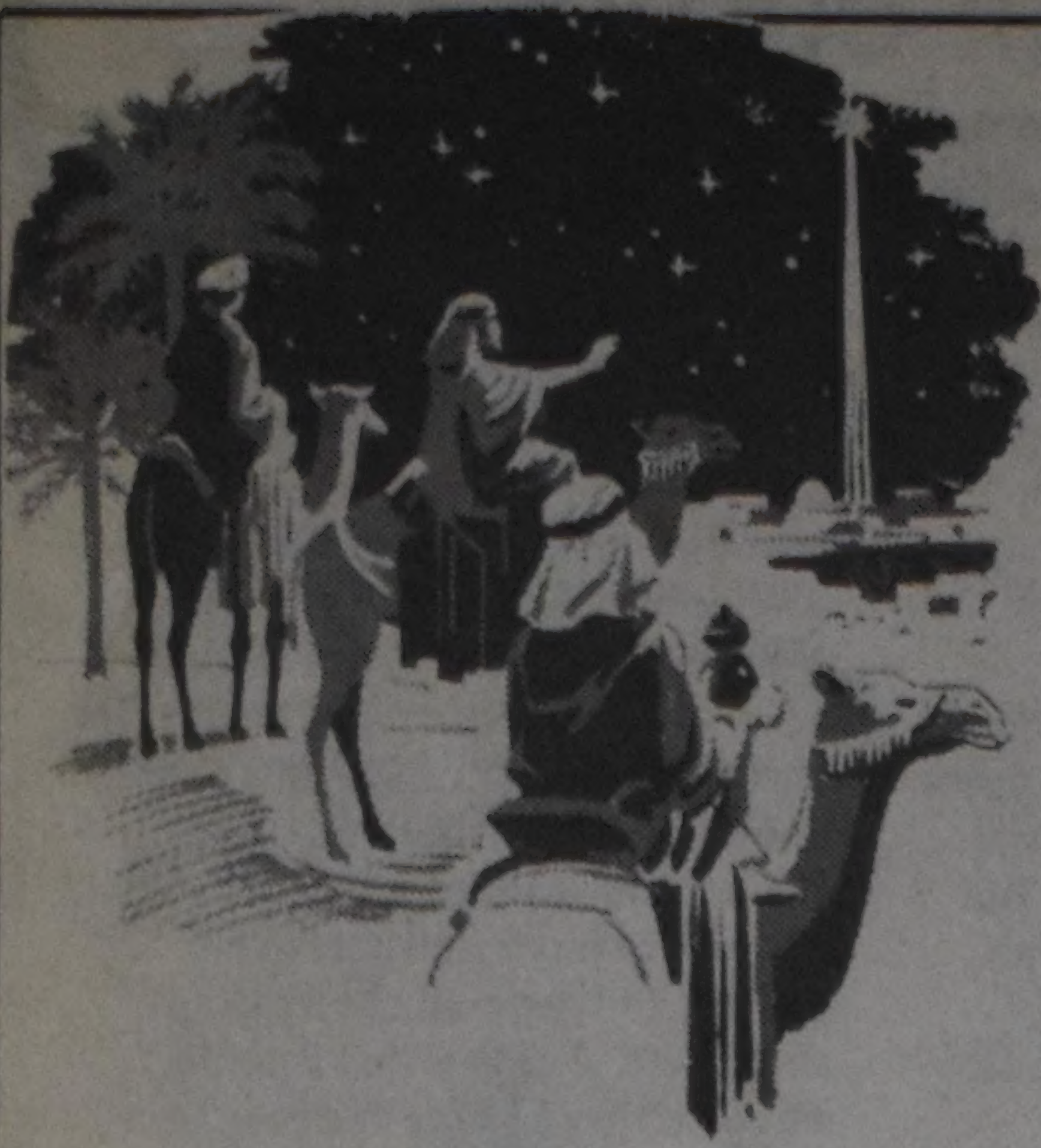
★★★★

She turned her wheelchair and made her way to the lounge. She needed someone to talk to, and Mr. Jones, an 85-year-old widower, would be medicine for her right now. His sharp wit had cheered her up many times. Christmas carols greeted her. Amazing how many choirs visited the home around Christmas. Here was yet another group, made up mostly of middle-aged ladies, brimming with benevolent good cheer. They sounded terrible, but never mind; they must know that most of the residents would not hear the difference anyway.

Mr. Jones saw her coming and moved his own wheelchair beside hers. "Choir number four this week," he announced cheerfully. Then, with twinkling eyes he whispered, "See that fat lady there? She's mad at me. She came to me dripping wet and complained about the weather, but let me know that she came anyway, because of an all-consuming love for us. I offered to dry her in the

Continued on page 9...





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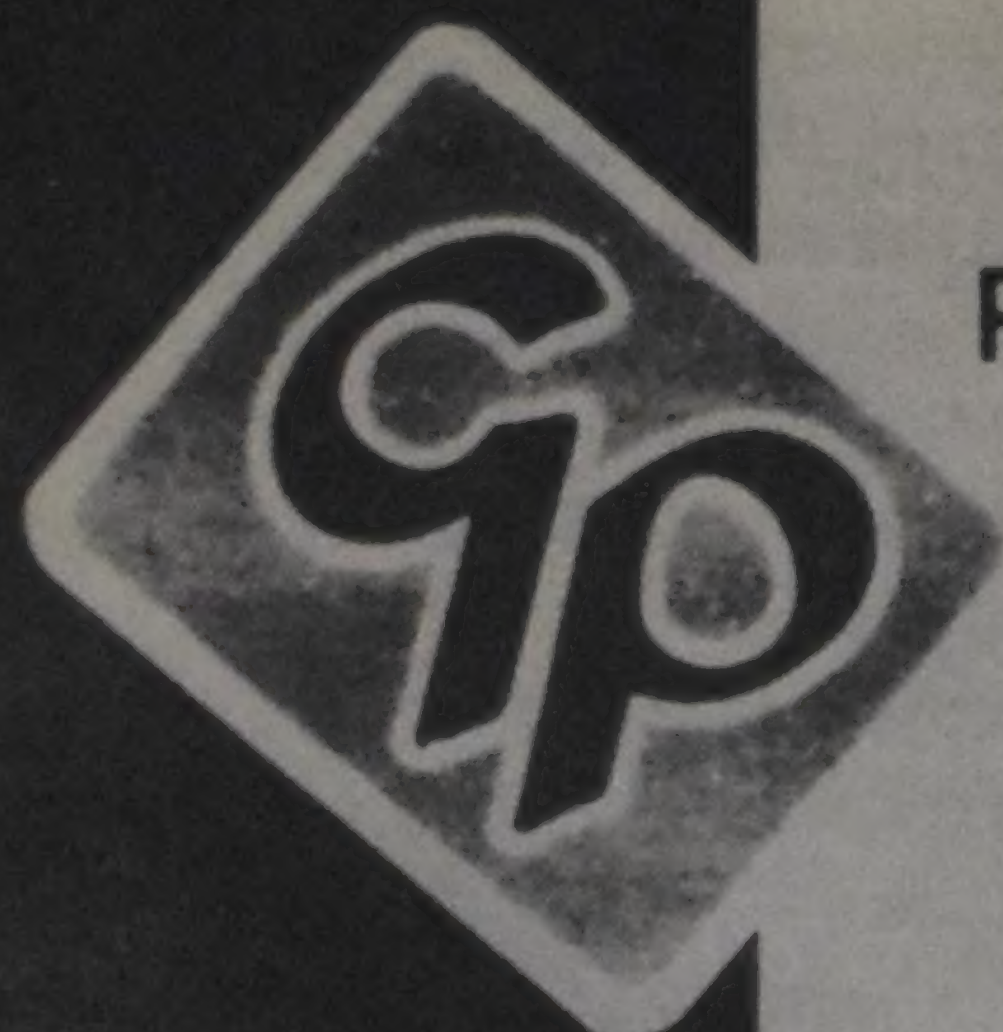
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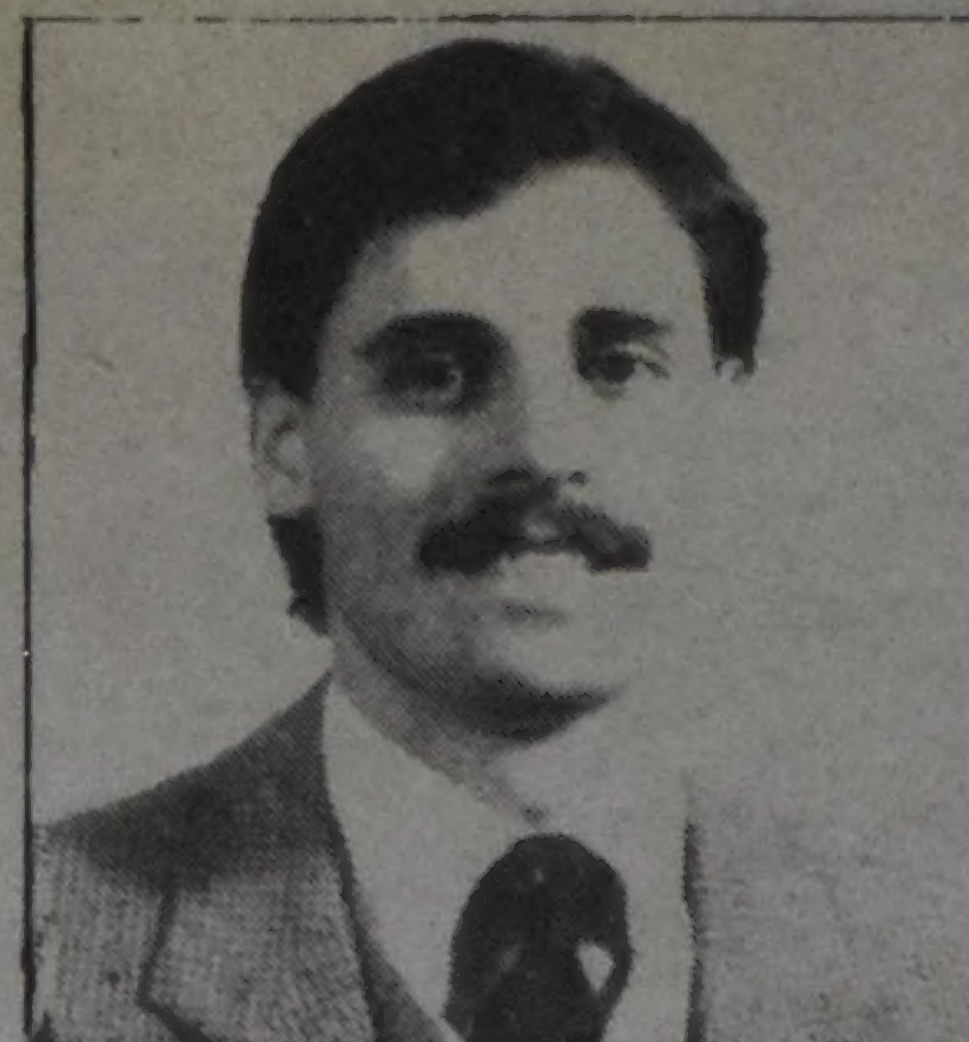
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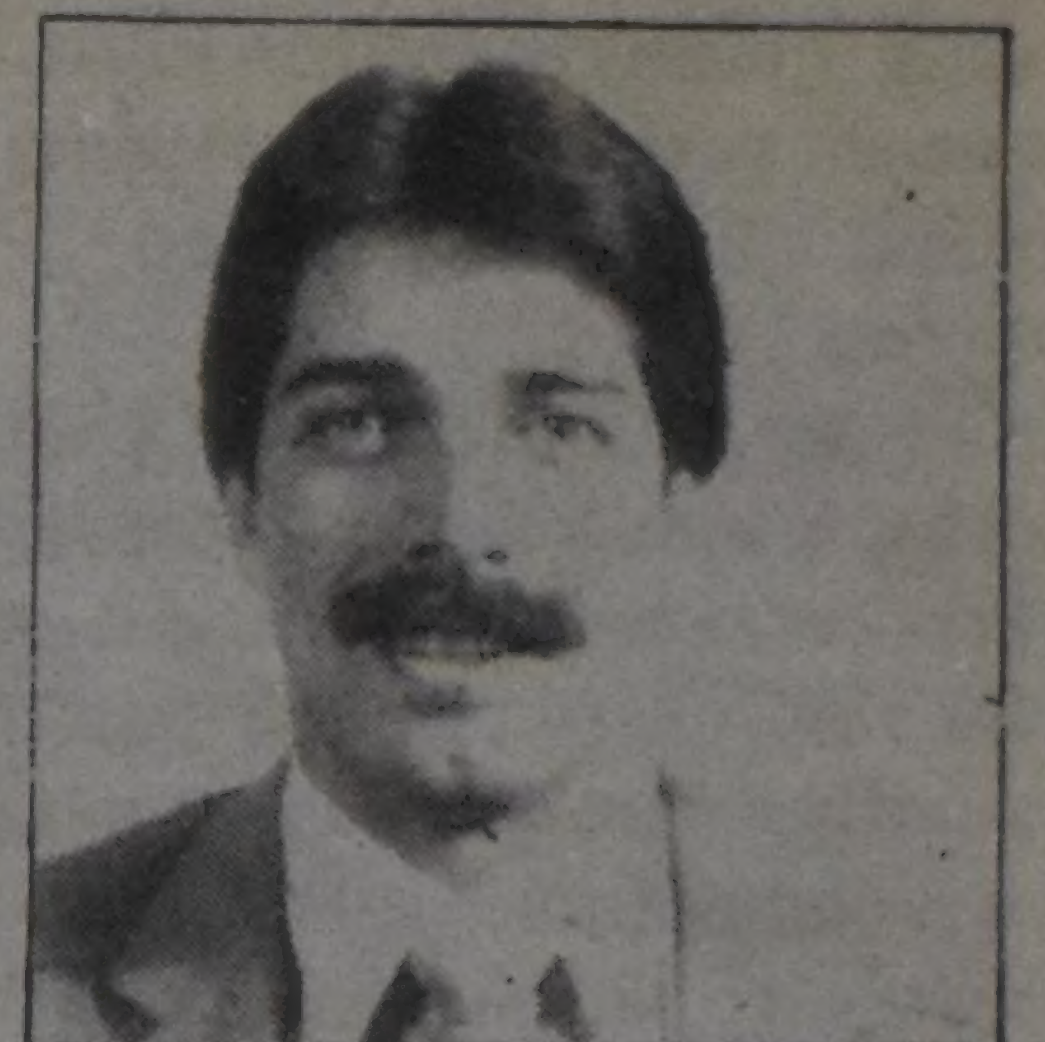
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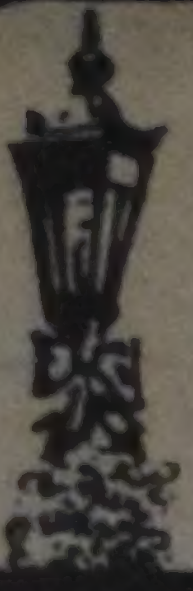


COR KANNEGIETER



KARL ZIMMERMAN

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Her small corner (Continued)

... continued from page 7.

kitchen oven. Now she thinks I'm off my rocker."

Ellen smiled. Mr. Jones was a prejudiced, sometimes nasty, sharp-tongued man who hated black people, despised immigrants and called the Jews "Christ-killers." But she liked his salty humour and loved arguing with him. She knew that in his own way he tried to lift her out of her frequent depressions.

Somebody pulled on her left arm. It was Mr. McFarland, who was becoming more confused every day. "What day is it, Ellen?" he asked in a plaintive voice. "It's Friday," she replied, and Mr. McFarland looked at her in total bewilderment. "All day?" he asked incredulously, and Ellen started to chuckle.

★★★★

The concert had ended and the choir members mixed with the residents. Ellen discovered a young girl who was also confined to a wheelchair. "Is she new here?" she asked Mr. Jones. "I haven't

seen her before."

"Yes, that's Rachel. She came this morning. Old Aggy of the East Wing kicked the bucket last night, so there was a room available. Poor kid. Incurable disease; probably a few years to live, but doesn't know that. Thinks she'll get better with therapy. She's waiting for an opening in a group home for young people. That's what she's been told, but she'll never get there. I had a peek in her file this morning when the nurse wasn't looking. Go and talk to her. I'm going to my room now; can't stand telling these holy do-gooders of the choir how old I am, and how long I've been here!"

"You're not fair," protested Ellen. "They did not sound the greatest, but at least they took time out to visit us. I bet most of these ladies have enough problems themselves at home, only we don't know about that."

"Glad you like them," mumbled Mr. Jones. "So long, Ellen."

Ellen shook her head. Sometimes Mr. Jones was a little too much, even for her. She might as well say hello to Rachel. She was not really in the mood

for another sad case, but she could not face her room either. "I'm Ellen, what's your name?" she inquired, and was startled when she saw the intelligent blue eyes in the exceptionally pretty face. "What a shame!" was her first reaction when she listened to the young voice.

"It won't be long before I'll move to the group home for further treatment and rehabilitation," chatted Rachel pleasantly. "My therapist is trying very hard to get me back on my feet. It's about time. I've been stuck with this illness for six months already. I want to go on with my life, do things, travel, go to college, fall in love, get married, have kids. My life has been on hold long enough."

Ellen looked at the eager face and momentarily, the paralyzing depression which she had come to fear so much more than physical pain, left her and a sudden, deep feeling of compassion almost overwhelmed her.

"Fall in love, get married, have kids," this doomed child had told her. She herself had experienced all those blessings, but this girl would not have

the time. Jeff had at least loved her for many years. Maybe he still loved her — or at least the person she had been; but he just could not cope, so he was giving up on her.

"It is better to have loved and have lost, than not to have loved at all," she remembered. Who had written those words again? It did not matter. What mattered was that this child needed her. Needed her to prepare herself for the inevitable, when the time would come. Needed her to be directed to another future, to faith, hope and love, if it would please God. Could she do that? She, Ellen, with her small faith, her grief, her despair and her fears?

Motherly love engulfed her. This child was her neighbour. This was her small corner for the time being: God's answer to her desperate prayer, a smile of encouragement from the Lord. He loved her as she was, and would never forsake her, even if Jeff should. All she had to do was believe.

Berta Hosmar is a writer of short stories from Whitby, Ontario.

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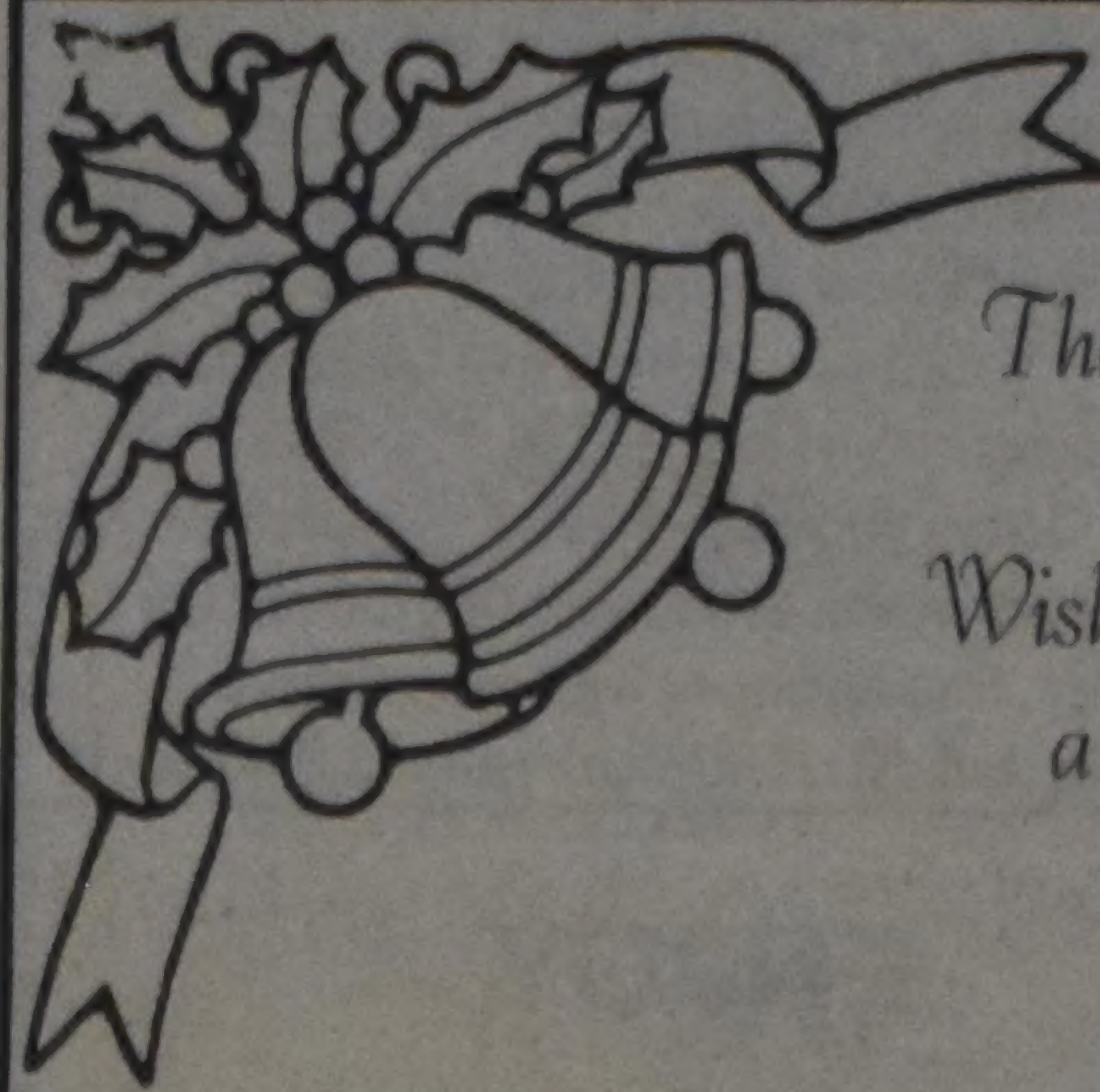
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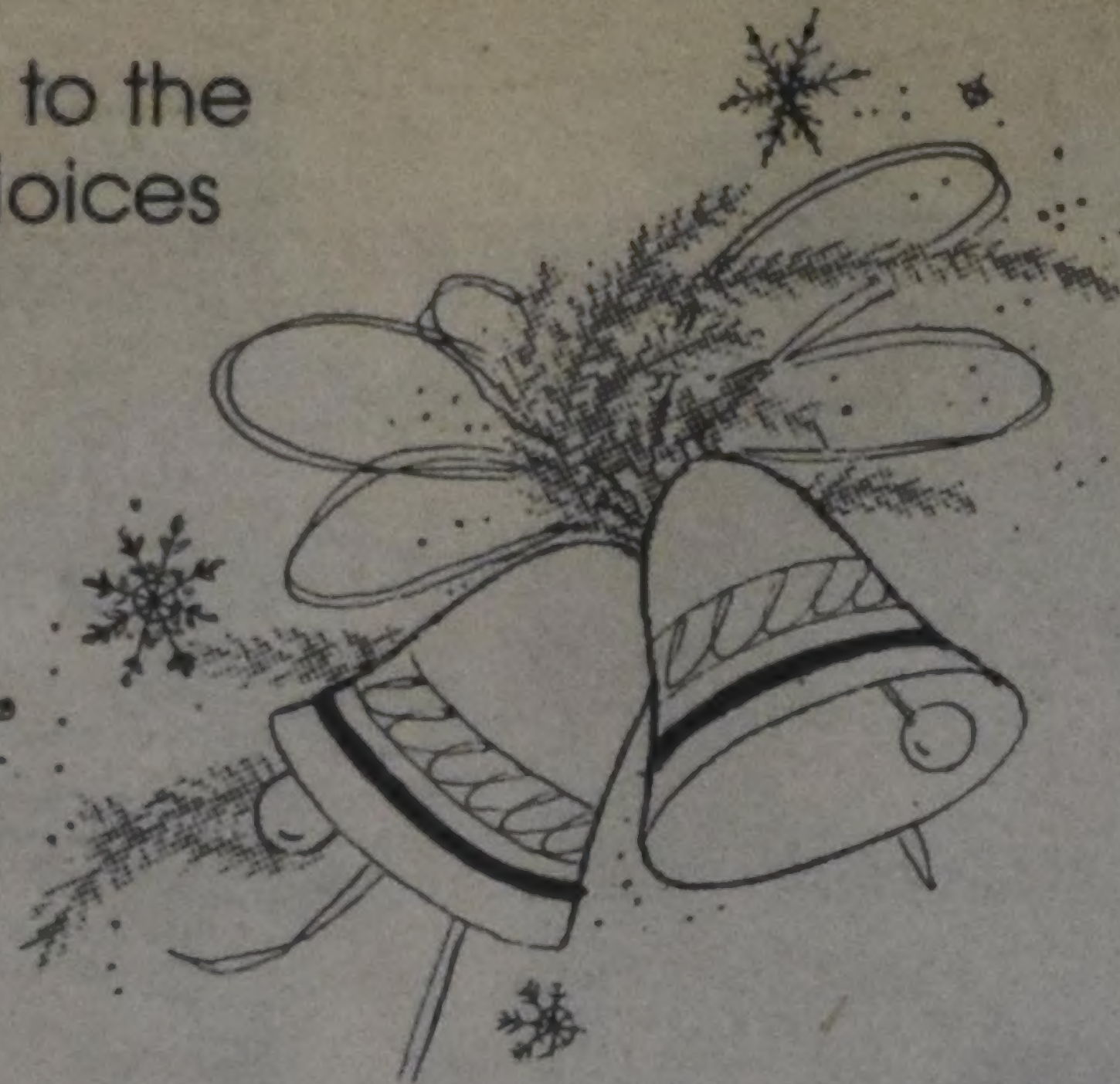
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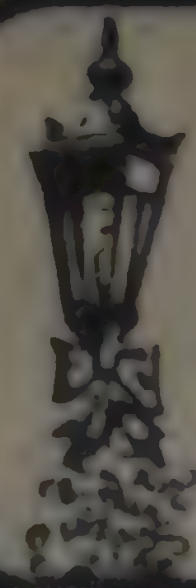
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Luke two: A child's view

Chapter I

Hi, my name is Rebecca. I am a shepherdess. I have a friend named John. I had a wonderful experience a few days ago. That is, John, I, and all the others. There was a good bit of trouble because of Jeremiah; he always goes the wrong way. But since the rest of us don't, we got there.

It was a normal day. Peter, David and Matthew were still fast asleep. But John, Jeremiah, Silas and I were wide awake and working. (Jeremiah



blankets when all of a sudden a great light appeared and with it an ANGEL.

I jumped. I think everyone did. John and I got up to run. But the angel said, "Do not be afraid, for I bring you good news." John and I sat down again and listened to what the angel had to say.

The angel said, "Jesus your saviour is born. You will find Him in a stable in Bethlehem wrapped in rags, lying in a manger."

Then thousands of angels joined him and sang, "Glory to God in the highest and peace to His people on earth." When all the angels were gone we started the long hike.

was hindering instead of helping.) I was waking up those who were still asleep. When all of a sudden John called me. I wondered what was happening, but there was no time for wondering. So I ran.

John and I had to chase a lamb. At last we found him — in Bethlehem. We brought him back and cared for him. Then we had supper. (We missed lunch.)

Chapter II

We were just finishing supper and those who were not done finished quickly because it was way past bedtime. We were just curling up in our

2

Chapter III

As you know Jeremiah got lost a couple times but found his way back. Not only Jeremiah got lost. We were all lost, but we got lost together.

At long last we found the stable and there He was just as the angel had said. Then we worshipped Him and me and John each gave Him three lambs. (Jeremiah didn't give him a lamb.) We talked to the Baby's mom and dad. The stable smelled like straw and animals. It had two candles, about seven people (not including us), ten cows (that is a lot), two mules (including the one Mary rode), thirty-one sheep (including ours), six horses. It was a very, very big stable.

4



Luke two: A child's view (Continued)

Chapter IV

We went out and praised God and knocked at doors and told everyone the good news. Then we went back to the field. All the sheep came back too.

Jeremiah went out and got some wood. Jeremiah had changed. It was a very good change too. Peter, David and Matthew weren't lazy anymore. That was also a good change.

As you know, every story has an end. But not this one.



Rebecca Ouwehand wrote this story in Woodstock, Ontario, when she was seven years old.

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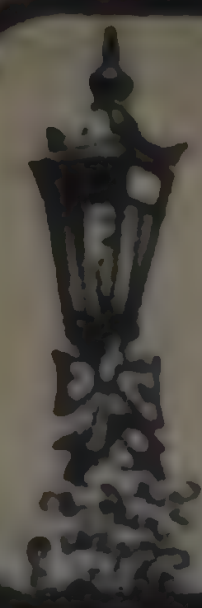
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The paper angel

Jacoba Bos

"Mommy, Justin spilled glue on my angel, now I can't hang it on the Christmas tree anymore." Lisa dashed into the bedroom. "Look mom, it's all dirty and sticky." She held up a cardboard figure vaguely resembling an angel with wings outstretched.

Jenny Brown lifted her fevered head off the pillow. "Maybe we can fix it yet, Lisa. Or make a new angel. Maybe daddy can help you tonight, if he's home early," she said hoarsely. Her throat was sore and her head ached.

"Why don't you play with your dolls and let Justin have the glue and paper for a while?"

"Oh, OK then," six-year-old Lisa pouted, as she left the soiled angel on the silky bedspread covering the waterbed.

"And will you see if baby Sarah is still sleeping?" Jenny whispered. "But be very quiet, will you?" Lisa tiptoed out of the bedroom.

Jenny sighed. Now to get some sleep. This bout of tonsillitis was leaving her feverish and weak.

If only Rob would be home early today, she thought.

Then he could make supper and put the kids to bed.

Jenny realized that wishful thinking would not get her husband home any earlier that evening.

That was three months ago, and Jenny still longed for her old home and familiar surroundings.

"Why don't you get involved in something, go shopping, visit a museum, or take a course at university," Rob had advised her when he noticed Jenny's quietness.

"Get out and get to know some people," he suggested, buttoning up his expensive jacket. Jenny watched him, as he drove away in their new luxury car, down the street lined with grand homes. She had never met the owners of those rich-looking mansions.

"Here, Mom, this is for you." Jenny was jolted back to reality by a sticky hand on her arm.

It was nine-year-old Justin, proudly placing a tray on the night table.

"Justin, that's great," Jenny said, thankful that her son's culinary efforts were limited to pouring juice and making toast. She drank the juice. "I'll keep the toast for later; and what's this?" Jenny held up a colourfully decorated folded piece of paper.

"That's for you, so open it," Justin said.

"For my mommy, she is no dummy; I ring the bell and you will get well," Jenny read softly.

"Justin, that's beautiful. You made it all by yourself?" "Yup." Justin's face beamed with pride.

"Shall I put it here so you can see it?" He carefully placed the card on the dresser beside the jewelry box.

"Mom, Sarah is crying, can I get her, I'll be real careful. Can I, Mom?" Lisa pleaded into her mother's ear.

"No, Lisa, you're not quite big enough to carry the baby. Hand me my housecoat, will you?"

Jenny steadied herself as she tied the robe around her slender body. She made her way to the nursery where baby Sarah greeted her with a wide

"Can I give her the bottle, Mom? I'll sit on the floor with her and I'll burp her," Lisa asked.

"Yes, you may," Jenny answered while she dressed the baby. "You are my big helper." Jenny smiled as she watched from the couch in the family room how her fair-haired daughter fed the baby, gently cradling her in her arm.

"Mom, the girl who always brings Dad's morning paper is here. She says she wants to talk to you." Justin came bounding down the basement stairs, followed by a teenaged girl in a wintercoat.

"Are you sick?" the girl asked. From her monotone voice and plain features Jenny sensed that the paper girl was different; she was retarded. Yet there was a certain sweetness and openness about her.

"Should I get my mom? She always knows what to do." Her brown eyes looked concerned at Jenny.

Jenny smiled, "I'm not real sick, just a sore throat."

Continued on page 15 ...

★ ★ ★ ★

Rob was a successful businessman and the weeks before Christmas were very busy for him.

"We are going to have us a great life together," he had said when the business he was employed with prospered.

"We'll live in a beautiful home in a grand neighbourhood, and you'll wear the finest clothes, my princess," he promised Jenny when he told her about his promotion, which meant moving away from the town which Rob and Jenny grew up in. Soon they were looking at homes Jenny had only seen in magazine pictures.

"Are we going to live in this house?" she asked, when a real estate agent showed them a four-bedroom mansion complete with three bathrooms and family room with fireplace.

"Rob, our furniture will not look right in this place," Jenny protested, remembering the faded chesterfield which had served them well in their 10-year marriage.

"Then we'll get some new stuff," Rob said, as if buying furniture were like going to the corner store for bread and milk.

"Trust me, honey, I really want you to be happy." Rob smiled, and Jenny realized that she was still deeply in love with her husband.

On a sunny September day a large moving van had pulled up to their small home.

Nimble-fingered workers had packed their belongings, while the children watched and Jenny labelled boxes.

"Don't wrap my doll, I want to carry it myself," Lisa had said, clutching the worn Raggedy Ann doll.

"My grandma gave me this doll before she went to heaven. Is your grandma in heaven too?" she had asked the girl who was busy wrapping dishes.

Lisa had not gotten an answer to her question. The movers had made quick work of loading the van; soon they were on their way. Rob and Jenny with the children had travelled in the station wagon. It was loaded with toys and games for the long trip to their new home in the city.

★ ★ ★ ★

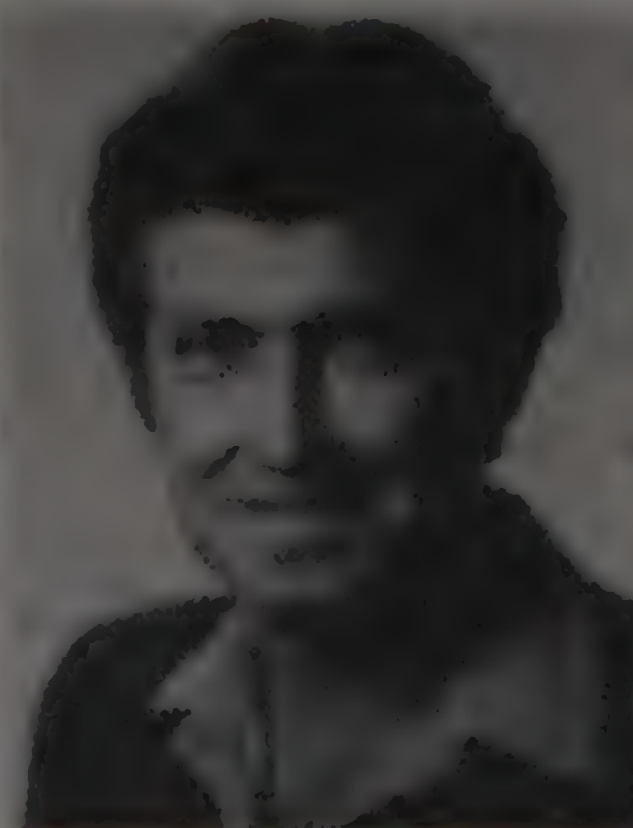


Illustration: Marguerite Witvoet

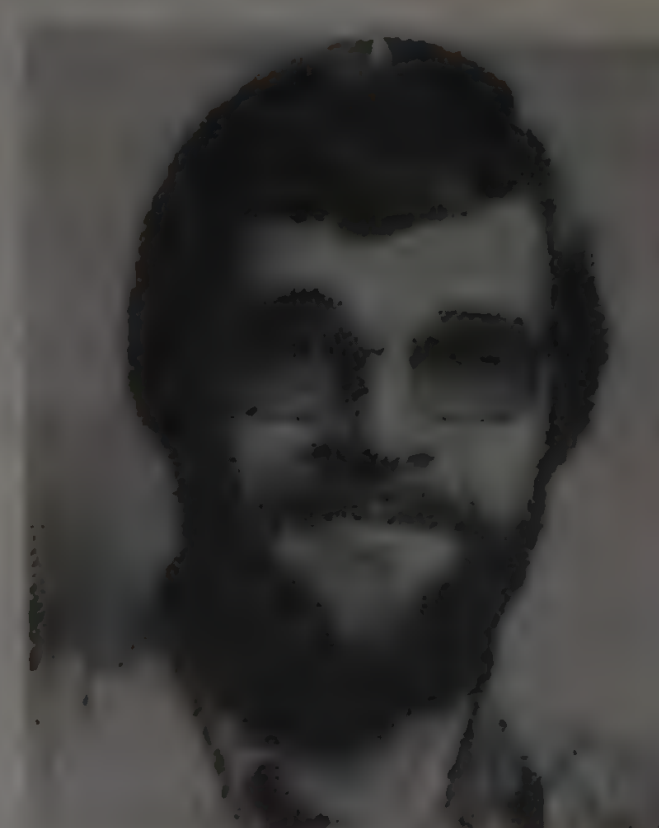


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The paper angel (Continued)

... continued from page 13.

"Oh, good." The paper girl was obviously relieved. She then continued in a formal way: "I came to invite you to our Christmas concert at the church next Saturday at eight o'clock and you are all invited to celebrate Jesus' birthday with us." She spread her arms wide, as if addressing a large audience with her memorized speech.

The paper girl then put her thumb in her mouth, awaiting replies to her invitation.

"Can we go, Mom?" Lisa pleaded. "Then I can wear my new dress, and my blue ribbon in my hair." She stroked her blonde pigtails, which were still uncombed.

"I will be wearing an angel dress," the paper girl said as she put her mittens on.

"And I'm going to sing 'Away in a Manger' all by myself." Her eyes shone with excitement.

"Is your whole family going to the concert?" Jenny asked as she took the sleeping baby from Lisa.

"Just me and my mom, that's my whole family. My dad is in heaven. My mom says that heaven is like celebrating Christmas every day."

"Wow, with presents and everything?" Justin exclaimed, looking up from his colouring book.

Jenny felt a lump growing in her throat.

"Thank you very much for inviting us. If I feel better by Saturday, we will all come," she said shakily.

"Thank you, Mrs. Brown. 'Bye Mrs. Brown, 'bye baby." The paper girl stroked Sarah's soft skin, trudged up the stairs, put on her boots in the spacious front hall, and stepped into the grey winter day.

As Jenny watched her disappear into the fog, she realized that she did not know the paper girl's name.

★ ★ ★ ★

Later in the day, when television entertained the children while Jenny rested in an easy chair, the doorbell rang again.

Justin dashed upstairs, opened the door, and hurried back to the television program.

A pleasant looking older lady came in. She carried a steaming pan. A delicious aroma of homemade soup filled the room.

"Excuse me for intruding," the lady said as she placed the hot pan on a stack of colouring books on the coffee table. "I'm Mrs. Hall, Naomi's mother. Your paper girl," she added, noticing the puzzled look on Jenny's face.

"Naomi told me you were not feeling well, so I thought you might like some soup for supper?"

"That's great, thank you very much," Jenny stammered.

"The paper girl asked us to her Christmas party," Lisa piped in during a TV commercial.

"She said she was going to be an angel. Then she'll be the paper angel," Justin giggled.

"She said heaven is like Christmas every day," Lisa said, proudly displaying her theological knowledge.

Mrs. Hall smiled. "Yes, Naomi is quite expressive about her faith. But I must go now." She turned to the door. "Please sit down and stay a while,"

Jenny urged, her voice still hoarse. "It's

so good to talk to an adult. I have no friends here, and my family lives far away."

"It's not easy uprooting your family, is it?" Mrs. Hall said as she sat down and unbuttoned her coat.

Jenny nodded and blew her nose.

"I remember when we moved to the city. I felt so lonely, I cried buckets-full. Of course, I did that when my husband was at work," she added with a smile.

Jenny nodded understandingly.

"Have you been alone ... long?" Jenny asked shyly.

"It was 10 years ago this week that I lost my husband," Mrs. Hall said.

"Naomi was only five. She kept asking when Daddy would come home from the hospital. She couldn't understand that she would never see her dad again."

Mrs. Hall's voice was almost a whisper.

"Could you accept it?" Jenny's face was a question mark.

Mrs. Hall looked out the window where the grey afternoon was being swallowed up by darkness.

"It was hard and it's still rough, especially at this time of year." She looked down at the work-worn hands in her lap, gently stroking her wedding ring.

"The memory of my husband's great faith, and the promise of our Lord that He'll return and take us to be with him is what keeps me going." Mrs. Hall stood up, abruptly. "Look it's already dark outside, and your soup is getting cold. Shall I bring it to the kitchen?"

"I'll show you where it is," Justin led the way, as Mrs. Hall carefully stepped around the toys on the floor.

"That was a nice lady," Lisa said, as she crawled onto her mother's lap.

Can we go to the party, Mom? I want



Illustration: Marguerite Witvoet

to see the paper angel. Maybe we can all go; Daddy and you, and Justin and me and baby Sarah," Lisa concluded. "I hope you'll be all better then," she added.

★ ★ ★ ★

Rob was not so receptive to the invitation for the Christmas concert. Jenny told him about it late that evening.

"Honey, that's the day we are to go skiing with my boss and his wife. I can't cancel that," he said, a frown spreading across his handsome face.

Couldn't we come home a little earlier then?" Jenny urged.

"The program starts at eight."

"All right then," I just hope that you'll be better by then," Rob said as he held Jenny's fevered hand.

★ ★ ★ ★

That Saturday, when Rob opened the morning paper, a large envelope fell to the floor.

"To my new friends, from your paper angel" was written on it in big letters. "Paper angel?" Rob raised his eyebrows. "Oh that's Naomi, the paper girl," Jenny explained. "The kids call her the paper angel because she's all excited about playing the part of an angel at the concert tonight."

Rob opened the envelope. "Please come tonight. I hope you do. God loves you and I do too," he read out loud.

"So we'd better be home on time tonight, my angel." He embraced Jenny, who still looked pale. "The sunshine will do you good today. Look, here comes our babysitter." Mrs. Hall came

in the front door, her face rosy from the cold.

"You picked a beautiful day to go skiing. Enjoy yourself and don't worry about the children," she said as she rescued the cereal box from falling off the table.

Rob and Jenny skied till the setting sun cast an orange glow on the horizon.

"You will come in and have dinner with us in the lounge, won't you?" Rob's boss, Mr. Smith, asked as they were taking off their skis. "They serve a good filet mignon here; or would you care for seafood?"

"Thank you for the invitation, but we have another appointment tonight. We're going to a Christmas program," Rob said, as he took off his mittens to help Jenny with her boots.

"Really? A Christmas concert? Will your children have a part in it, and is Santa bringing presents?" Mrs. Smith's voice reminded Jenny of pink icing on a cake — artificial and too sweet.

"The program is a celebration of Christ's birth, and we really want to be part of that," Jenny said as she slipped her foot into her shoe. "Besides that, a good friend of ours has a part in the program."

"How nice! Is it a play perhaps, a Christmas pageant?" Mrs. Smith sounded almost interested.

"Come on Helen, let's not hold Rob and Jenny up any longer," Mr. Smith interrupted. "Folks, it's been a great day. Hope we'll get to do this again real soon this winter." He shook Rob's hand and pecked Jenny on her glowing cheek. When Rob and Jenny returned home, they were greeted by Justin and Lisa in their Sunday best. Mrs. Hall had even managed to braid Lisa's hair.

"Look Dad, I'm wearing a tie, just like you," Justin said. "But I can't get my hair to stay flat like yours." His wet hair was standing up straight.

The church was nearly filled when the Browns arrived, with Mrs. Hall showing them the way.

Naomi, already in angel attire, stood up from her place near the front and waved enthusiastically, her wings nearly knocking off the halo of the angel beside her.

A feeling of contentment came over Jenny as she listened to the age-old message in song and play.

Naomi sang "Away in a Manger" in a clear, pure voice to a hushed audience. And when she sang, prayerfully, "Be near me, Lord Jesus," her face glowed with a rare inner beauty.

"She looks like a real angel, doesn't she?" Justin whispered in his dad's ear.

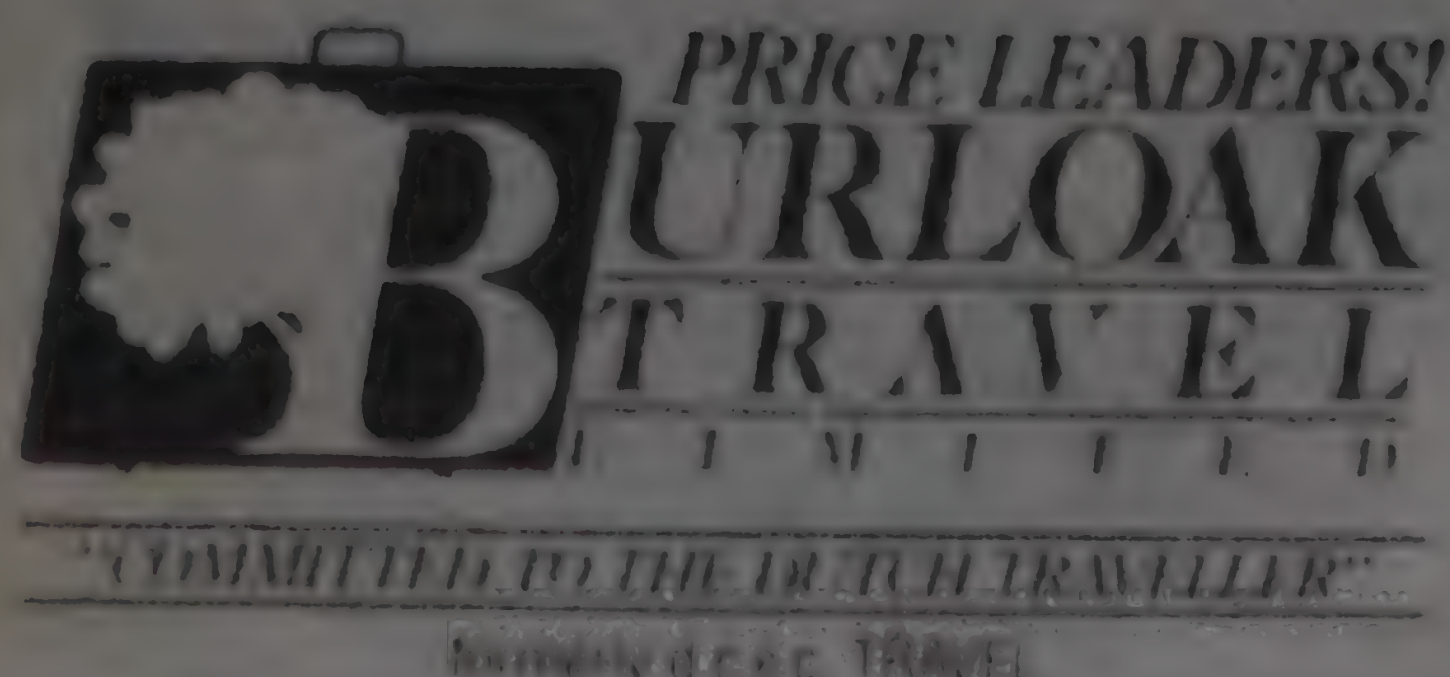
When they came home, Rob carried the sleeping baby to her crib, while Jenny put Justin and Lisa to bed.

"It's been an unforgettable day," Jenny said as she and Rob relaxed by the fireplace.

"You know," Rob said as he looked into the fire, "Tonight I discovered what I have been missing." He paused to put a log on the fire. The sparks illuminated his face. "Tonight, as I was sitting in church, I thought about the angels bringing the good news to the people. It seems that God used a paper angel to bring me back to the real values in life, like the love of my family, and above all, His love for us."

Lucinda Blevins is a free-lance writer who lives in Stratford, Ontario.

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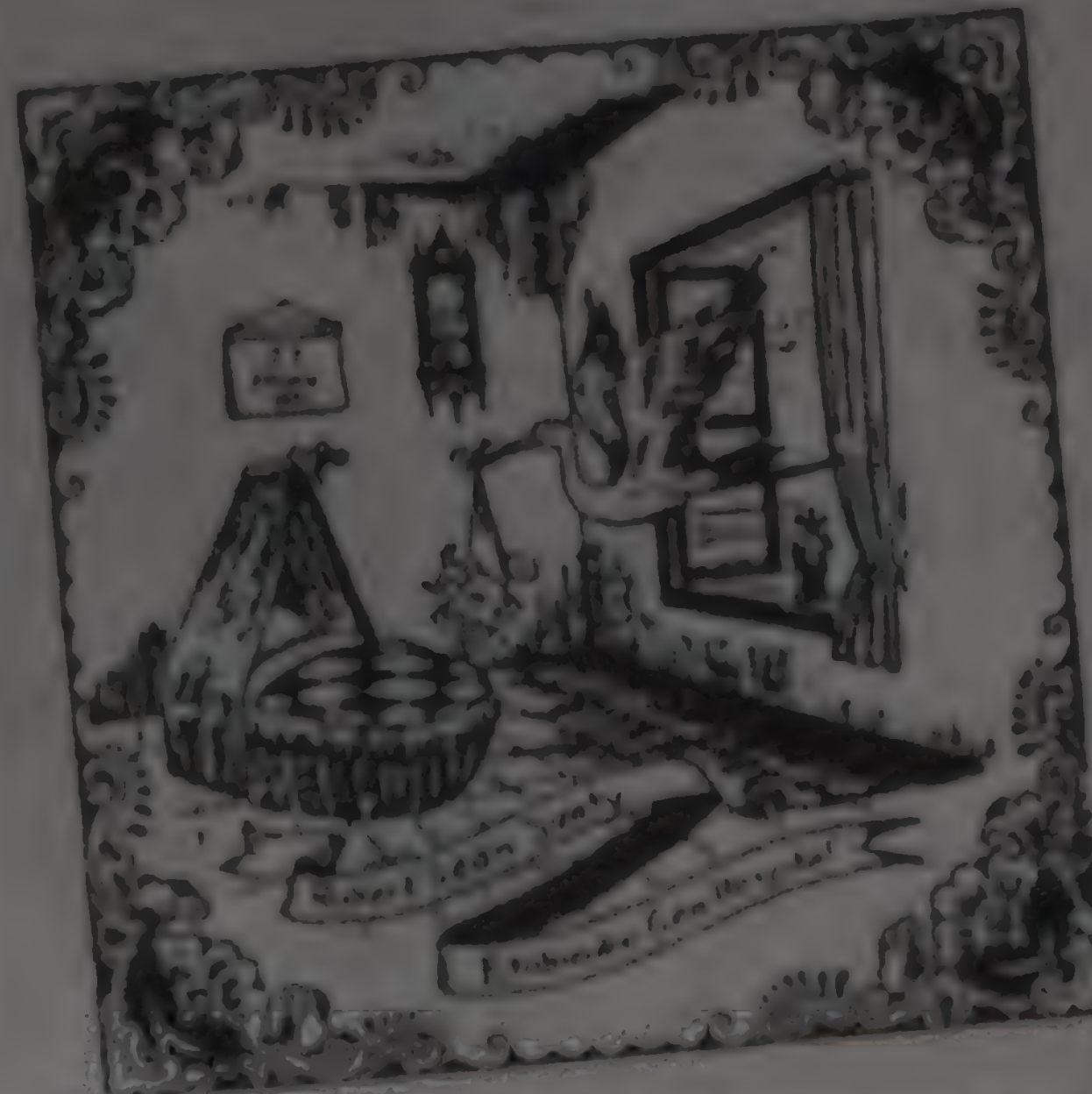
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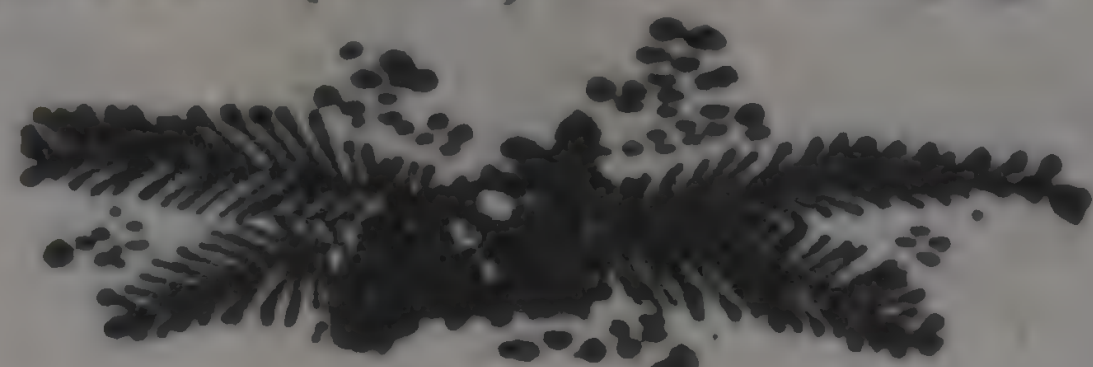
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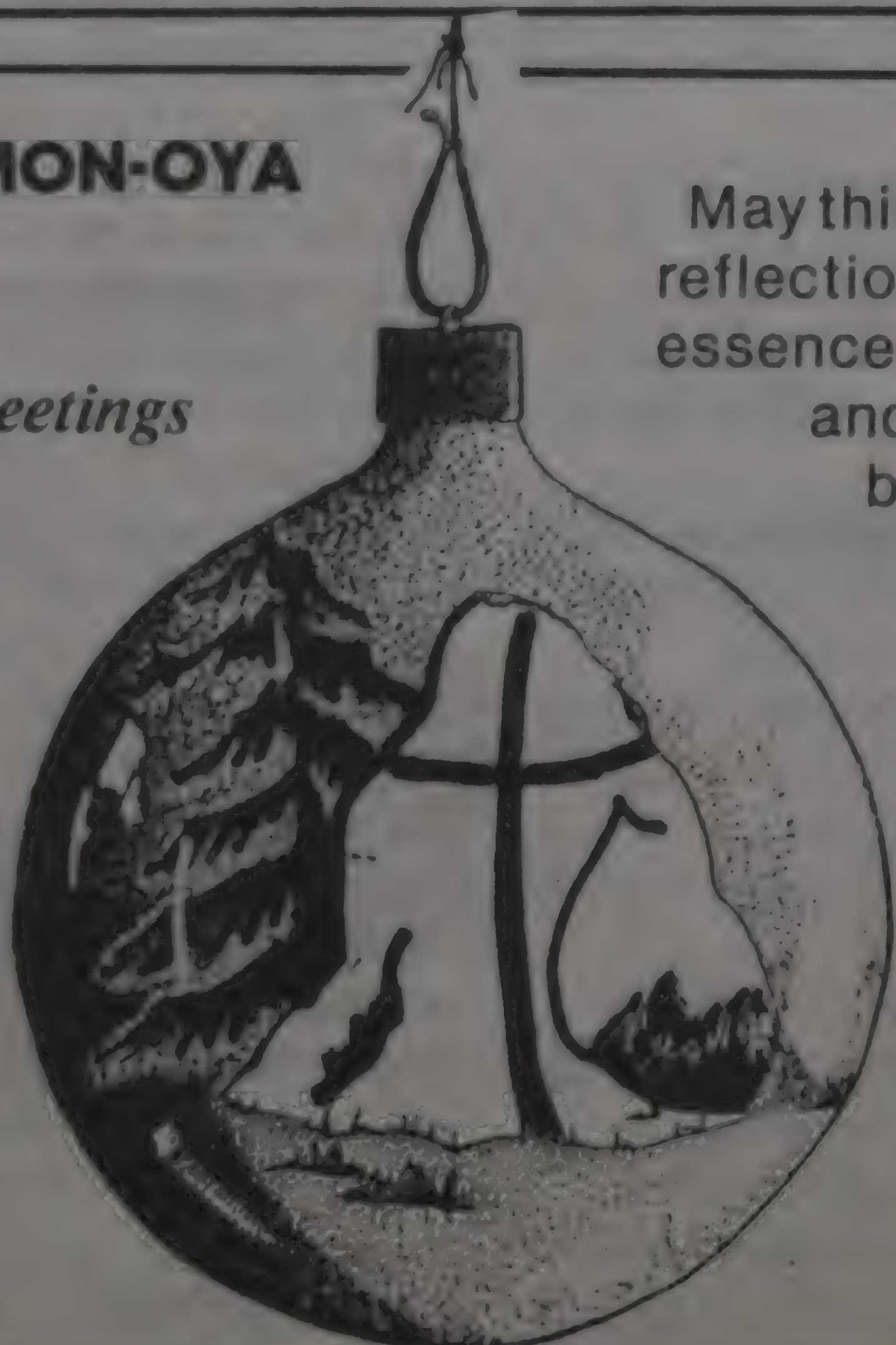
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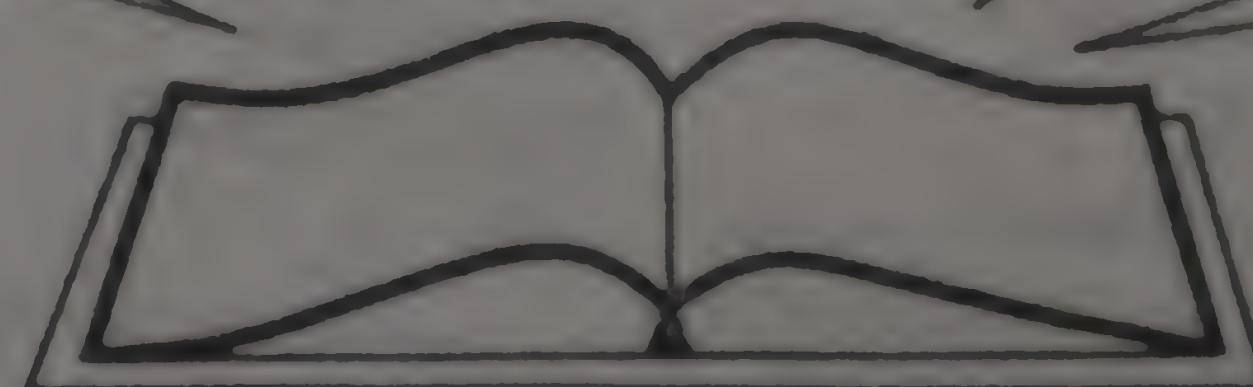
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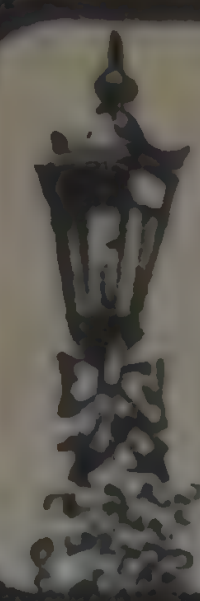
**THE PEOPLE WHO WALKED IN DARKNESS
HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT;
THOSE WHO DWELT IN THE LAND OF
THE SHADOW OF DEATH,
UPON THEM A LIGHT HAS SHINED**



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Which star are you following? Moishe Rosen



When you were born did people come to welcome you from faraway places? Did strangers bring you expensive gifts? Did they find your house by following a star? If you are like the rest of us mortals, your parents probably received a telegram from Uncle Oscar in Hoboken, a recycled greeting card with an illegible postmark from Aunt Matilda, and a fuzzy baby blanket from some long-forgotten cousin in Sheboygan. If you were really fortunate, maybe you did receive one expensive gift from a stranger — a silver-plated baby cup from your father's boss! If anyone came from out of town to see you, it was probably your grandparents, and they did not find your house by tracking a star. If visitors did not know your address, they looked it up in the telephone book.

Outside of a child's parents and close relatives, not too many people celebrate its birth. What's more, the heavenly constellations have a more serious function to perform than lighting the way toward homes where baby earthlings wait to be admired. Only the Son of God merited that kind of welcome, and the earthly debut of the rest of us is not that important — except to those who love us.

As we leave infancy, we begin to

realize that the world does not revolve around us, nor do we have our own personal "star." The desire for recognition and importance sometimes causes us to become "star-struck." We look for a cause or situation that will help us feel important. Sometimes we seek out others who have "made it big" or are celebrities of some kind. We think that if only we can bring ourselves within their aura, we may be able to bask in some of their glory. We hope that just a fraction of their brilliance may bounce off us in such a way that others might think it our own. Some live vicariously through such "stars." Unfortunately, sometimes they are not very discriminating in their choice of whom or what to follow.

Not so the wise men who sought the Messiah, the King of the Jews. The Bible does not really tell us exactly who they were, or even how many there were. Tradition and all the Christmas card manufacturers seem to indicate three persons of royal lineage. For all we know, there might have been only two — or there might have been as many as would comprise a large caravan. Nevertheless, going on the somewhat logical assumption that there was one giver for each of the three gifts mentioned, and in order to maintain the

familiar image, let us suppose there were the traditional three.

Can you imagine those wise men gazing into the heavens and dividing the stars? One is in charge. He says to the other two, "OK, I'll take the little red one off to the left, you take the blue one high on the horizon, and you take the bright one over there on the right. Let's all meet back here in a week and compare notes on what we have discovered." Or suppose they decide to follow only one star. They need to decide which one it will be. The choice becomes a matter for considerable discussion. They appoint a committee to help them decide, and the committee tables the matter until a later time so they all can be home for the holidays!

We know that is not how it happened. The wise men followed one star, the one God intended for them to follow. (That was part of their wisdom.) They all arrived at the same place at the same time. Following God's star gave them unity of purpose and insured their arrival at their intended destination. Those wise men, whoever they were, had something we often lack. They had a reverence for the mystical, a sense of awe and holy wonder.

We moderns seldom allow ourselves to be awed or astounded by what God is

doing. Perhaps that is because we do not quite believe that He is really doing it. Besides, we would much rather "do it ourselves." Each of us wants our own star to follow. We want to follow it in our own way, at our own pace, to the beat of our own drum. It may not even matter very much to us whether or not that star leads anywhere, and if we cannot quite distinguish one star from the others, we will take our own direction anyway. We are determined to go it alone, not because we necessarily like our own company, but because we crave a tailor-made star for a customized life. We want to choose our very own destination, even if we have never been there and are not sure where it is, or if it is a good place in which to be.

When Y'shua promised his disciples a heavenly destination, he said, "In my Father's house are many dwelling places." Can you imagine one of them protesting, "But Lord, I don't like living in an apartment?" Another complains, "I don't know if I want to live there until I know more about the neighbourhood. Are there any of 'them' living there? You know, 'they' are the other kind of people, those who are not like us. Are we going to have to live in 'their' neighbourhood?" Some want

Continued on page 18 ...



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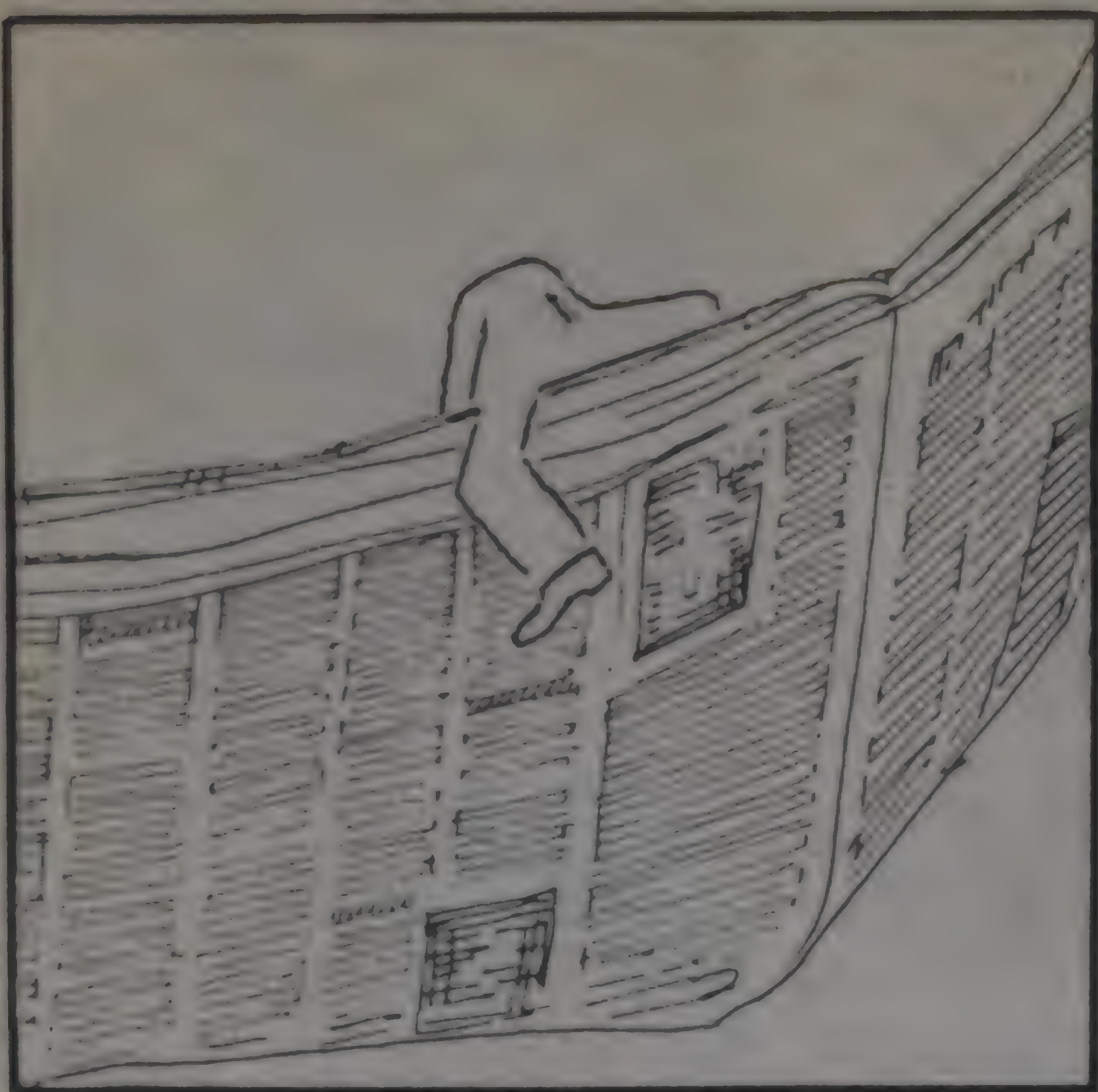
Grace Bowman

Christ has the true and perfect gentleness,
No harshness has He and no bitterness;
Let us now see the Child in deep humility
And next year stay in his sweet unity.

Willy Suk-Kleer
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The Bethlehem Star

Ron B. De Boer



Illustrations by Doug Roorda

December 24, 1986

Nervously, Peg tried for the third time to squeeze her Chevy between the two sports cars. The huge, flickering Christmas tree on the wall beside the Woolco sign lit up her face for a second then left it shaded, only to light it up again, revealing a field of furrows on her forehead, worry-lines that had become more and more a part of her since Gord's death. It occurred to her that everything had been so much easier before Gord died. He used to shift into reverse and zip into parking spots Peg was sure were too small for a Rabbit — without even looking.

Christmas shopping would be a chore this year. Last year Peg and Gord had spent an entire evening flipping through a stack of catalogues and making lists of possible gifts for the kids. They never stressed the importance of a lot of gifts, but they tried to create a spirit of giving in their home. It wasn't the present you thanked the giver for, but it was the thought and spirit behind all the wrapping paper and bows. Besides that, they couldn't afford a roomful of gifts on Gord's teaching salary.

Jeff and Marsha would be coming home from college later that night, but Peg wanted the tree up and decorated — with bulbs and icicles, and the shiny Bethlehem star, of course — and the presents under it before they arrived. She wanted the manger scene that Marsha had drawn in second grade hung up, all the Christmas cards strung from one end of the livingroom to the other and she wanted Christmas carols playing on the stereo — just like all the other years. But she knew Christmas couldn't possibly be the same without Gord sitting on his recliner cracking

jokes and snapping pictures while the four of them opened their presents.

December 25, 1962

"So this is the place you rented for us, Gord."

"OK, OK, I'll admit it's a little run-down"

"A little run-down! Didn't you see all those cockroaches over by the bed? They didn't even run, they feel so at home here!"

"OK, laugh all you like, guys. Just for that, I officially resign from the renter's committee. Any volunteers for next year's committee?"

"Here."

"Here."

"Here."

"Very funny guys. Well, at least we've got beds. You brought the sleeping bags, right, Tim?"

"I brought three. You said you were bringing your own, Gord."

"You've got to be kidding. Three sleeping bags! And you call yourself a senior accounting student? What are we supposed to do now? I am definitely not sleeping with Louie. It's hard enough being in the same dorm with a guy who grinds his teeth all night, let alone sleep right beside him."

"You're not exactly my idea of the perfect overnight date yourself, Gord."

OK, OK, maybe that old geezer who checked us in has an extra sleeping bag."

"Did you bring the food, Gord?"

"Tim, Tim, Tim. Would I forget the food? We are going to eat like kings for two days here. I'm going to show you the difference between cafeteria food and real food. Did anyone bring a can opener?"

"Yeah, I did. By the way, Merry Christmas, guys. Looks like we're going to have as good a semester break as last year."

"Yeah, I think you're right, Louie. Wasn't that philosophy exam a bear? I tell you, who really cares whether you think, or whether you are or you ain't?"

"Flunked, eh Tim?"

"Not funny, Gary. I hear you didn't do so hot on your biology final. Wouldn't want to be a patient of yours — your diagnosis may be right only 40 per cent of the time."

"Guys, guys! Enough about school. It's bad enough Gary brought next semester's books along; let's certainly not dwell on our exams. Let's get this stuff unpacked and do some skiing before dark"

"Who's in charge of the fire?"

"Louie is."

"Gord, you brought your guitar?"

"Yup. The second annual Westley-Hall-Room-104-Gift-Exchange is set for eight o'clock."

December 25, 1986

Peg sat cross-legged on the couch, thumbing through a worn and faded photo album full of black and white snapshots of Gord's college days. Most of the pictures were of Gord's roommates, frozen in time: Louie playing "guitar" with his tennis racket; Tim lying in bed, pretending to be sleeping while clutching a calculator; Gary sitting at his desk doing homework; and Gord, in his underwear, covered with shaving cream. And there was a series of snapshots of the four of them standing wrapped in heavy coats and thick boots in front of a snow-capped shack. The

dates on the pictures started in 1962 and went all the way to 1985 — last year, the last year such a picture could be taken.

Those four had religiously — every Christmas — gone up north and roomed together for one night. Gord loved driving up to the cabin to be with his buddies, although Peg fussed about it occasionally, saying the family should come first. "Yeah, but it's only one night, Peg," he would say with those college-boyish eyes. "Well, OK, but drive carefully, Gord; the roads can be bad up north," she would say finally.

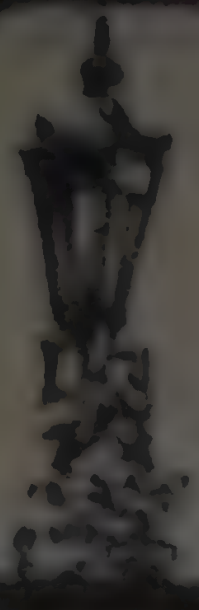
On Christmas night Gord and his roommates would sit around a fire outside the cabin and exchange gifts and brag about how successful they had become since college — how much money they were making. That part of the evening had bothered Gord. It had bothered him how Gary would year after year lean over to him and ask, loud enough for the others to hear, "So, Gord, how much does a high school teacher make these days?"

"Oh, minimum wage, minimum wage," he would say, reaching for his guitar and smiling. "Anyone have a favourite?" And then they would sing their college alma mater.

It had always amazed Gord how three guys could graduate from the same Christian college and have such a different perspective on life. For his roommates, life was a five-bedroom house, a Mercedes, and a 200-horse power speed boat for the weekends. It had only been a couple of months before Gord's 40th birthday that he had made his last college loan payment.

But that part of the night hadn't bothered Gord enough not to go to the cabin.

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The Bethlehem Star (Continued)

...continued from page 19.

Peg closed the album and picked up off the coffee table a box that was neatly wrapped in shiny, green paper spotted with striped candy canes. Around the box was a thin red ribbon tied into a neat bow on top and beside the bow was a tiny card: "To the three craziest maniacs that ever invaded Westley Hall. Love, Gord." Peg lifted and shook the box, then held it up to the lamp, as if she would be able to see through all the paper and cardboard. It couldn't have weighed more than an ounce.

All Peg knew of the present was that Gord had wrapped it five years ago — when he had turned 40 — and told her to give it to his roommates if anything ever happened to him. Then he had stuck it on the shelf in the bedroom closet and that's the last they had talked about it. Peg had taken it down that morning.

Again, she lifted the box up to the light and stared at it for a long time.

December 25, 1962

"Hand me a weenie, will you, Tim?"

"Hang on, Gord. The fire's barely burning and you've wolfed down two hot dogs already."

"Didn't I say we'd eat like kings?"

"Pork and beans. Campbell's soup. Hog dogs. That king you're talking about must be reigning over the poor country."

"All right, that's it. I resign from the food committee. Any volun—?"

"Here."

"Here."

"Here."

"Very funny, guys. You know, guys, you do realize this is our last year together? In five months we graduate and enter that big bad world our profs have been warning us about. Tim'll be an accountant; Louie, an exec in some big corporation; Gary, a doctor — eventually. And I'll be teaching next year. I can't believe it."

"I'll say. But at least we'll be making money."

"And lots of it, hopefully."

"Is that all you guys can think about — money?"

"Well, yeah."

"You're just sore because high school teachers don't make any, Gord."

"Yeah sure, laugh, guys."

"Is someone going to hand out the presents, or what?"

"Is that all you can think about, Louie? What you're going to get? See how materialistic you are?"

"Well, yeah. Something wrong with that, Gord?"

"No, Louie, nothing. Tim, hand out the presents, will you?"

December 25, 1986

Tim's jeep was already parked beside the snow-capped shack when Gary and Louie arrived. The three of them stood in the cabin, clasp hands and hugging each other for a few minutes. They had come later this year, and the sun had already disappeared behind the hills. The three of them then went outside and began building a fire beside the cabin. There were no jokes about who brought the matches or who was in charge of keeping the bears away this year. The three of them chopped wood and piled it in the place where they had cleared away the snow. Gary stuffed some old newspapers between the wood and held his lighter to them. Soon a



small flame appeared and began licking at the wood. Ten minutes later, the place cleared of snow was aglow and the flames cast odd, flickering shadows on the faces of the three of them as they leaned forward, rubbing their hands and staring into the fire.

Gary spoke first.

"You know, I never thought it'd be Gord to go first. You know, him being a Christian school teacher and all. I always thought he'd be like ... protected, you know? He always seemed to have a clear vision of what he was going to do, how he was going to change the world. Cripes, he knew in high school already that he wanted to be a teacher. I didn't know I wanted to be a doctor until I was a junior in college, and I still wonder sometimes if I made the right decision — what with two malpractice suits in the last year and a half."

"But why him?" asked Louie, shaking his head. Tim and Gary shrugged. A year ago, they would've verbally jumped on Louie for such a simple question. Now all they did was stare into the fire.

"I hear him at night," said Tim.

"When I'm lying in bed some nights I hear his laugh. Two nights ago, I dreamt we were here again — all of us." He continued to stare into the fire, as if the flames were bringing it all back to him again.

"We were all sitting around this fire: me, with my calculator, Gary with a stethoscope around his neck, and Louie in a three-piece suit. It was a really crazy dream. Anyway, Gord was standing in front of us, waving his arms, and sort of preaching to us, teaching us things. I don't remember what he was saying, but he was smiling; the whole time he was smiling."

"Then we ran inside the shack and we were college seniors again, and we were all bugging Gord because he forgot to bring half the things he was supposed to. And Gord would laugh and laugh and laugh. That's usually when I woke up — when I heard Gord's laugh. But two nights ago, I never woke up. As Gord was laughing, he hauled out that old Bible of his. Remember? The one with no cover, that had the dried up peanut butter right on top of Genesis one? He hauled that one out and held it up and said, 'I bet nobody thought of bringing this.' And then we sat around that old rickety, wooden table — the one that gave you splinters if you put your elbows on it — and Gord read the Christmas story from Luke. 'Luke two, eight to 20,' he said and then he read. And we all had our elbows up and we were listening to him. Remember when he did that the first time?"

"But, boy was it a crazy dream. Then we were all sitting around this fire again in our suits, but Gord was standing up and walking away. Then he was gone, and it was just the three of us sitting there, just like now. That's when I woke up." Tim pulled his hat over his ears and huddled a little closer to the fire.

"He's probably the only one of us that never questioned the faith," said Gary. "While we were flunking out of theology and philosophy, Gord was living it. But he never told us that. He'd just joke around and act real happy — all the time. Looking back, I can't remember a time when Gord was down about anything. There were actually times when I would've traded my patients in for his students."

"Except for the money, of course! Right, Gary?" said Louie.

"Yeah, except for the money."

"Money's not worth a whole lot to Gord now." Louie looked up toward the speckled sky and a shooting star streaked across the blackness. The three of them had seen it, and they wondered if it had any significance on Christmas day. Gord would have looked at it philosophically. He would have said something like, "That's pretty weird, guys. All of us seeing the same shooting star. Maybe it's some sort of message — like for the wisemen." But they all would've laughed and said, "You're crazy, Gordo!"

Suddenly, headlights pierced the darkness and a rumbling engine cut into the silence. The three of them jumped up at the sight of Gord's Chevy.

"I know this is 'guys only,' but Gord wanted you three to have this." Peg walked over to the fire and placed the package on one of the stools. Before any of them could say anything, she was gone, the snow crunching under his tires as she drove off.

"To the three craziest maniacs that ever invaded Westley Hall. Love Gord," read Gary at the Old rickety table in the

cabin. "Who wants to open it?"

"Go ahead, Gar, you do it," urged Louie.

Gary untied the ribbon as if he were in slow motion and lifted up each piece of tape, as if he were afraid he would break whatever it was inside the box. Under the wrapping paper was a flimsy, blue box, like one you'd put a cup and saucer in. Gary opened the flap on the box and looked in.

"C'mon, Gary, this is driving me nuts."

"Yeah, c'mon, Gar. Hurry it up, will you?"

With surgeon's hands, Gary reached into the box and lifted out a cassette. The three of them stared at it for a few moments, wondering what Gord could possibly have found important to say to them.

"Anyone got a tape recorder?"

"Yeah, I do. In the jeep. Let me get my keys."

The three of them huddled closely on the front seat as Tim slipped in the cassette. At first there was only static — a hissing, crackling sound — and then the sound of someone clearing his throat.

"Hi guys. Gee, I can't believe I'm dead." The three of them smiled at Gord's laugh.

"I expect you're all having a good time — lots of laughter around the old campfire. Anyone forget to bring a can opener this year? It's kind of nice you guys can't talk back to me. I guess the floor's all mine. Anyway, I'll get to the point. First of all, Merry Christmas, and I'm sorry I can't be there with you this year." There was a pause and the sound of papers rustling.

"I bet nobody thought of bringing this. Luke two, eight to 20..."

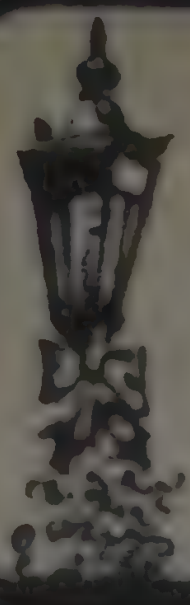
As Gord read, the three of them huddled together, listening intently to the story Gord had read every year. When he had finished, Gord paused for several seconds before more rustling could be heard. And then there was the sound of a single chord played on Gord's guitar, and he began singing their college alma mater.

The three men sitting in a frosty jeep on Christmas night began singing along, and by the end of the song, they had their arms around each other and were singing as spiritedly and idealistically as they had on the eve of graduation day, 25 years ago. When the final stanza had been sung, there was no more Gord. No preaching, no advice, no moral instruction. Just crackling and static. Eternity.

The three of them sat for a few minutes, listening. And then Tim reached for the rewind button.

Ron De Boer teaches English at Chatham District Christian Secondary School.





A dog for Christmas?

Jan de Bree

On the last Saturday in November, Jason and Tanya were up early. The evening before mother had talked about new plans for the upcoming Christmas. They were to buy meaningful presents, spend less money and give some thought to those who were poor and hungry.

Father had spoken of the good old days when his family was poor and when he was happy with a small gift — an orange and some nuts. He described how his family gathered around the Christmas tree to sing carols and tell stories. Father said, one Christmas eve while the Christmas story was being read, his dog, outside in the snow, had howled. Grandmother and grandfather had argued whether or not to let the dog into the house. The argument came to an end only when grandmother said that on the first Christmas in Bethlehem there were animals in the stable with Mary and Joseph. The dog was let in and spent a wonderful evening under the tree. Father thought it would be good if they could have such an old-fashioned family Christmas eve.

This morning, Jason and Tanya were up and ready to plan their new Christmas. Decisions had to be made. They had to decide whether socks for father and perfume for mother were meaningful gifts, and if five dollars was too much money to spend on a present. They discussed this at length. The more they talked, the more impatient they became for Christmas eve.

"Jason, can you imagine us sitting around the tree singing and reading?" asked Tanya.

"Dad makes it sound like fun; probably more fun than watching those TV Christmas specials. There will be presents under the tree, hot chocolate, oranges and peanuts. It will be wonderful."

"But you missed one thing Jason—a dog. A dog under the tree."

"Oh, well, we can do without a dog. Besides, Mom and Dad will never let us have a dog."

"If we can't have one, maybe Mom and Dad can," said Tanya.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, we can give Mom and Dad a dog for Christmas. Dad likes dogs. He used to have one, and I bet you he'd like one of his own right now."

"Do you think you are going to get away with this, Tanya?"

"Sure! Once they have a dog they'd never send it away. This way we'd have a dog on Christmas eve to put under the tree," said Tanya.

"But there is a problem. Where are we going to find a dog?"

"We can try the animal shelter across town."

"Good idea," said Jason, as he jumped off the couch. "Let's eat and go there."

Secret mission

The children ran to their rooms to dress and then to the kitchen to eat breakfast. While finishing their cereal, their mother came in and asked where they were going. Jason told her that they were visiting friends down the street and he promised to be back by lunch.

The animal shelter was three miles away on the other side of town, past the railway station and firehall. Jason and

Tanya cycled there. When they arrived they saw a small, white stucco building with only one window. At the back was a brown wooden addition where the animals were kept. The children parked their bicycles against the building close to the front door. It was Tanya who opened the door. The office was empty. On the back wall behind the counter hung a calendar with a photograph of a poodle. Cautiously the children stepped inside.

"It stinks," said Tanya.

"Shh! Ring the bell," whispered Jason.

"No, you!"

"No! It was your idea to come here."

Tanya reached over the counter and hit the bell.

"Hit it again," urged Jason.

She did, and before she could lift her hand from the bell, a heavy-set woman had entered the office.

"Hello, children, what can I do for you?" she asked.

"Can we look at your dogs?" asked Tanya.

"Certainly," said the woman, as she walked toward the brown door which had a sign on it that read, "Employees Only." As they passed through the door, the children saw wire and grey pipe. The air smelled like the air in the office, only stronger.

"Here we keep all our dogs. If you'll come in a little further you can see them. What kind of a dog were you looking for?"

"A black one," said Tanya.

"We have a friendly black dog right here," said the woman.

The children stood next to the woman and looked into the cage at a large black dog.

"Is his name Fritz? My dad's dog was Fritz," said Tanya.

"I think he'd make a wonderful Fritz," said the woman.

"Can he do tricks?" queried Jason.

"I don't know," answered the woman as she turned to go. "Do you children have a place for a large dog?"

"Oh yes!" said Tanya. "We'll put him under the tree."

firehall and were nearing home when Tanya asked, "Jason, how about the dog that hangs around the school?"

"What dog?" asked Jason.

"You know, the brown and white one everybody feeds."

"What about that dog?" said Jason.

"We can take him home for Christmas and put him under the tree. He doesn't belong to anyone."

"How do you know?"

"We can ask around on Monday. But I'm quite sure he doesn't belong to anyone. He is so dirty and hungry," said Tanya.

"How are we going to get him home? He wanders all over town," said Jason.

"We'll feed him every morning before school and play with him at lunch. That way he'll get to know us."

The following Monday morning at school Jason and Tanya began befriending the brown and white stray. Many school children fed him and played with him. It would take some effort from Jason and Tanya to win the dog's affection. Every day they played with him. By the end of the week the other school children no longer included the dog in their play because he was always with Jason and Tanya.

"Under the tree?" asked the woman, a little puzzled.

"Yes, grandmother said so. She said because there were animals in the stable the dog is allowed to be under the tree," said Tanya.

"Couldn't the dog stay in the stable?" asked the woman.

"I don't know. I'd have to ask my dad about that."

"Why don't you do that!"

"Can we have that dog now?" asked Jason.

"You'll have to come here with your parents. There are papers to be filled out and fees to be paid."

"What are fees?" asked Tanya.

"Money," said the woman.

"How much?" asked Jason.

"Forty dollars."

"That's a lot of money."

"That's the way it goes. You run along and tell your dad. Then come again with him," said the woman.

The children said goodbye and left. "Forty dollars and papers to be filled out." The disappointed children were pre-occupied by that sombre thought as they pedalled home.

The familiar landmarks were passed unnoticed. This morning finding a dog had seemed simple. Now after a short visit to the animal shelter, finding a dog was turning into a problem. They had cycled past the railway station and

At the beginning of the second week, Jason asked his mother for an extra sandwich in his lunch. Two were not enough. Tanya took an old hair brush from the bathroom to clean the dog, who now met them each morning at the end of their street and walked them to school.

Friday of the third week was the last day of school before the Christmas vacation. Jason and Tanya stood in the middle of the school playground looking at the dog.

"What are we going to do? We can't take him home yet. Mom and dad will find him for sure," said Tanya.

"I've been thinking. We'll take him home the day before Christmas. He can stay under the verandah where dad keeps his ladder and old lumber. In the meantime we'll come to the school every day to feed him," explained Jason.

"We'd have to find food for him."

"I've got an idea for that too."

Tonight I'm checking out the freezer."

"Did you hear that?" said Tanya to the dog. "We'll take care of you. And then you can come home with us. You'll like our house."

They said goodbye to the dog and went home.

Meat pies and table scraps

After supper that evening Jason sneaked down the basement stairs to the freezer. Just as he wanted to open the

Continued on page 22...

A dog for Christmas? (Continued)

...continued from page 21.

Freezer lid he heard his mother's footsteps on the floor above him; he stood still and listened. She was on her way to the bedroom. He lifted the freezer lid; it squeaked. Jason's eyes darted over the frosty packages and stopped at the meat pies.

He thrust his hand in and grabbed a pie. As he put the pie under his sweater he let go of the freezer lid and it slammed shut. The noise frightened Jason and he quickly made for the basement door. Outside, he hid the pie in the lumber pile under the verandah. Tomorrow he would retrieve it and bring it to the dog.

For five days they fed the dog mother's meat pies and table scraps. On the sixth day, the day before Christmas, they brought him home and hid him under the verandah where Jason had made a bed of old coats and Tanya had placed a bowl of water.

"Tonight we'll surprise Mom and Dad with their present," said Jason.

"Yes," said Tanya. "But there is one thing. This dog stinks. We should give it a bath."

"We can't give it a bath. Mom and Dad will find us out."

"Maybe we can put perfume on him. Mom has lots of it," said Tanya.

"Good idea. You get perfume and I'll get another meat pie."

Jason peaked from behind the door. When he saw no one in the yard, he stepped out from under the verandah, followed by Tanya. Jason scooted through the basement door to the freezer while Tanya ran up the steps and through the front door into the house.

Jason was quick to return with his meat pie. But Tanya took longer. There were eight bottles of perfume to choose from and she wanted a bottle mother no longer used. The decision was difficult. After five minutes of handling perfume bottles Tanya chose the dustiest one. When she turned to leave, she bumped into her father.

"Where are you going with that bottle?" asked father.

"I'm just playing."

"Your mother tells me there are strange things happening in this house. She is missing a hair brush and six meat pies from the freezer. Do you know anything?"

"We're just playing," said Tanya.

"What about those meat pies?"

"Jason knows."

"Where is he?" asked father.

"Playing."

"Show me where," demanded her father as he grabbed her by the shirt collar and walked her out of the bathroom. With her head down, she led her father to Jason. She stopped in front of the small verandah door and pointed. Father stepped past her and opened the door. Stopping, he disappeared under the verandah. Father spoke angry words. Jason tried to explain.

Father reached out to grab Jason. Then there was a growl and a scream. Father stumbled through the doorway, his pants ripped.

"Where did that wild animal come from?" shouted father. "Look at my pants. I guess he's been eating our meat pies. Jason, put that mad dog in the car. I'm taking him to the animal shelter. They can do with him what they want."

"But, but Dad," stuttered Jason.

"He is your Christmas present."

"Dad, he is supposed to be under the tree tonight," said Tanya.

"What, and have him bite me again? Nothing doing. He's going. Put him in the car."

Fleeting present

The despondent children watched their father drive away with the dog they worked so hard to befriend. The Christmas that was supposed to be different was turning out to be a miserable Christmas, with Father angry, the meat pies eaten, and the dog gone.

"Now we don't have any presents for Mom and Dad," said Tanya.

"I know," answered Jason.

From the kitchen window, mother called the children into the house.



"We're coming," said Jason.

Father was away at least two hours before he came back. And when he was back he stayed in the garage for some time. He talked to himself and banged about; then he ran into the basement and back out to the garage. Out he came again and ducked under the verandah. He returned to the garage carrying the old coats and the bowl. It seemed father was cleaning up the things Jason and Tanya had brought together for the dog.

When Father finally entered the house, he sat himself down on the living room couch and quietly read the newspaper.

Jason and Tanya were afraid. This was the quiet before the storm. They waited and waited. Mother prepared supper. The knife chopping on the cutting board was a welcome distraction. If only Mother made more noise to drown out the angry silence and fear the children felt. Suddenly, they heard a dog barking. Mother also heard it.

"Sounds like there's a dog in the garage," said Mother in the direction of the living room.

"Probably the neighbour's dog," said Father.

"The neighbours don't have a dog."

"Down the street they do," answered Father.

"Please go out there and take a look. I don't want that thing making a mess on our lawn."

"I doubt if he's in our yard. He's probably out in the street," continued Father, and he stayed in the living room.

Father sounded friendly just then. The children wondered if he had overcome his anger and had forgotten about the dog bite and the meat pies. When they sat down at the dinner table, Father smiled, was pleasant, and made no mention of meat pies and dogs. It was not until they had settled into the living room to celebrate Christmas eve that he said anything.

"Something should be done about those missing meat pies. I could take them out of your allowance," Father began.

"Yes, I think that is a good idea," said Mother; and the children agreed.

"Now that this is cleared away let's

sing some songs and then we'll open the presents."

The children were relieved. Father was happy again and they were celebrating Christmas around the tree as planned. The presents lay under the tree. There were oranges and nuts on the coffee table. Only Jason's and Tanya's dog was not there.

When they finished singing, Father stood up and said, "I forgot to do one thing. I must go down to the basement and count how many meat pies are missing from the freezer. Otherwise I'll forget all about it tomorrow ... and I'll bring up the turkey too."

"You don't need to do that now. I can get the turkey later. And I know how many pies are missing. Sit down and

enjoy yourself," said Mother.

"No, I want to do it." He stood up and disappeared.

He made a lot of noise going down the basement stairs and then it was quiet. Mother and the children waited and waited.

"Your father is taking a long time counting meat pies," Mother said with a smile.

The basement door banged shut and again they heard Father on the basement stairs. But when he entered the living room he was not carrying the frozen Christmas turkey, but a large black dog.

"We'll put him under the tree," said Father.

"What are you doing with another dog?" asked Mother.

"This is our Christmas present from Jason and Tanya and I'm putting him under the tree," said Father, eyes twinkling.

"That is the dog from the animal shelter," exclaimed Tanya gleefully.

After Father put the black dog on the floor, he explained how the brown and white stray dog had escaped when he opened the car door while at the animal shelter. And as he watched the dog run away he suddenly realized it was his Christmas present that was disappearing down the street. He thought of Jason and Tanya and decided to look for another dog in the animal shelter. There he bought his own Christmas present; the same black dog Jason and Tanya had seen weeks earlier.

Jason's and Tanya's Christmas eve turned out as planned. After the gifts were opened Father read the Christmas story while the black dog slept under the tree. They named him Fritz.

Jan de Bree teaches art at Smithville District Christian High School, Smithville, Ontario.



Which star are you following? (Continued)

... continued from page 17.

more particulars — about the plumbing, the wiring, the utilities and the size of the gardens in back. Others ask suspiciously, "If it's such a good place, why is the rent free?"

Of course, the "rent" is not free. The place God has reserved for us was bought. He paid the price, and it was anything but cheap. It cost him the ignominy of the incarnation and the ultimate pain of Calvary. Despite that heavy price, many stubbornly resist. They still want to be choosy — about where they live, where they are going, and how they will get there. They want their own way and their own star that will follow them.

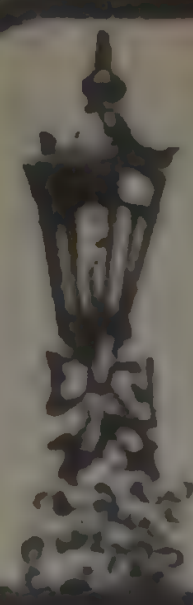
Others are not bothering to go anywhere and are not really searching for anything. Society has taught them that life will knock at their door and present them with its "goodies." Life is not like that. What is truly worthwhile does not sneak up on people and invite them to possess it. That which is truly meritorious always seems to beckon from a distance. It requires us to travel to it. Besides, that which is really good — God's kind of "good" — may not always seem desirable. For those who want that kind of good and right, all of life is a pilgrimage, just as it was for Father Abraham. Furthermore, most of us are not able to travel "first class" on that journey. Instead, we get loaded aboard the "People's Express" or steerage class.

But whether or not we travel "first class," we do have a star to lead us — Y'shua, the Bright and Morning Star. When we commit our lives to him, his light brightens our path and his warmth keeps us growing. If we look for him we can "see" him quite clearly. Then though the path may be narrow, we are willing to follow him because we know that if he guides our way, He will insure our safe arrival.

I recall two rather clever bumper stickers of the past decade that made that point. One declared, "Wise Men Still Seek Him." The other proclaimed, "If you can't find God, He's not the one who is lost." The Lord God has never changed his location. Humanity has abandoned God by heading in the opposite direction. To find the right path a turn is necessary — a drastic 180 degree turn at that!

At times the road may seem long, but we have a Star to brighten our way. It may seem lonely, but He is our companion. It may even seem puzzling, but we have a good book of directions to keep us from going astray. The Messiah laid aside his shining glory to come to this earth — to live and to die. He gave his life that we might live through him and for him, and He lives again to show us the way. That is the complete message of Christmas.

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Poetry

Trembling night

That was a night of trembling,
a time the strings tying
the universe together pulled tight
and hummed.

Few noticed.

But here new winds blow; there,
beings of light translated joy
and hope into song.

Stars shifted.

In this configuration one light
stood forth to catch watchers.
Christ was born.

Jeff Seffinga

The magi meet

And so this way they meet. Under a thin
winter sky they come in the dark time to
the only place about that could provide
shelter and water, fodder, and enough
fuel to keep warm their servants and their beasts
even on coldest nights. As travellers will,
they exchange tales of forces that have pulled
them here; they share stories of a blazing
star in an eastern constellation that
draws them: three men from three far corners.

They all agree. A king, a holy one,
was born under this star at a sure time;
and they will witness, whether He may lie
in royal splendor or a weathered barn.

Jeff Seffinga,
Hamilton, Ontario

The shepherds

One night so still, so deep,
with voices hushed by slumbering sheep,
while they their faithful vigil kept,
and all of earth and heaven slept

They saw
the heavens open, and a sky
that filled with angels from on high.
They heard
that wonderful and awesome word,
the angels' song
about the long-awaited Peace on earth,
the message of the Saviour's birth.

When after the last angel God closed the door,
and heaven and earth were quiet once more,
they simply did as they were told,
and unconcerned about their fold
these men — most privileged —
then went with haste
to find the Saviour of mankind.

Didy Prinzen,
Whitby, Ontario

Christmas

Almighty God,
become a little child;
why is it that
you love me, sin-defiled?

For what am I
to you, who am so small;
who, knowing me,
don't know myself at all?

You have become
what I would ever be,
had I observed
your word and law for me.

"Unless you too
become a child within,"
you said to me,
"you cannot enter in."

Your word, your law,
your speech, your active grace
are written on
this tiny infant face.

You vow and do,
I neither do nor dare;
I am, O God,
no child who trusts your care.

If you don't make
me, as you do and vow,
I'm down and out ...
O God, have mercy now!

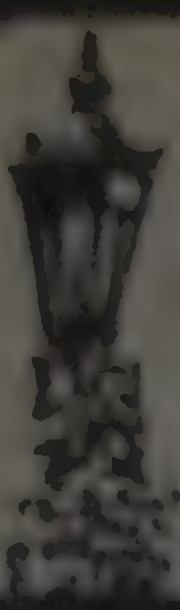
Guido Gezelle
translated by Bert Witvoet



Illustration: Jack Parham, Liberty, 1988

Giving warmth

Jennifer W. Hoeksira



It is the time of year again when I begin to get "warm fuzzies." I anticipate the days till Christmas that will be filled with baking, sending cards, making and buying presents and listening to familiar carols.

Every year, around the end of November, I plan for the gifts I'll give my family and I become very secretive. We all drop subtle hints to raise each other's curiosity levels as the time draws nearer to Christmas. Presents are worked on and orders for a treasured book or record are taken.

I recall one Christmas my mother acted pleasantly surprised when she

received a rug wall hanging I had made for her. Months later she confessed that, while cleaning, she had come across wisps of the yarn I'd been using and the actual gift under my bed. My mother had remained silent but was warmed by my efforts.

Something of this joyful anticipation — which my husband and I now enjoy — is how I believe Mary and Joseph must have felt as their baby's birth drew near. They knew God's love for us was miraculously tied to this child of theirs. They realized that they would soon be giving the world an important message from God.

Imagine God smiling on the special feelings of joy we Christians have as we share gifts with each other. For this type of love-manifestation is exactly what Christ's Spirit was given to do.

I hope that the next few weeks for you will be a time of experiencing the warmth of gift planning and giving. For I believe Christ will be knocking on each door to see if his Spirit of love is living there.

Jennifer W. Hoeksira lives in Annan, Ontario.

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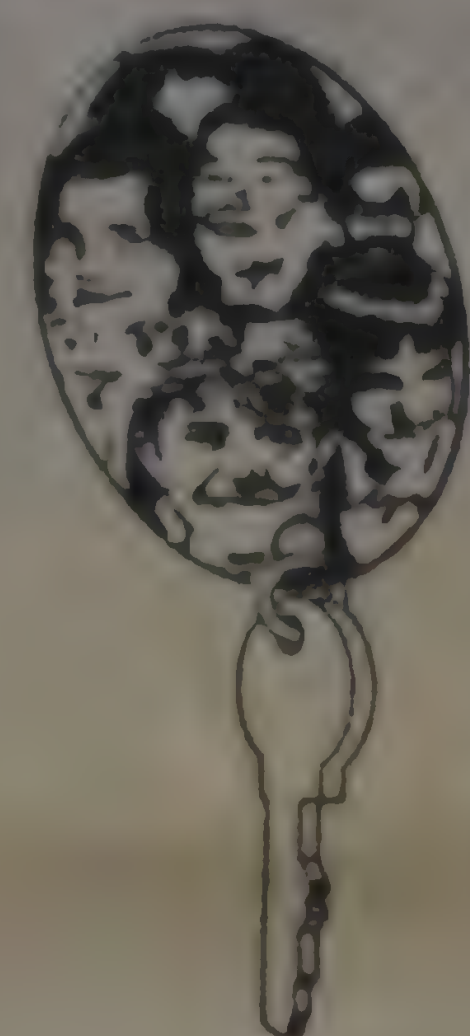
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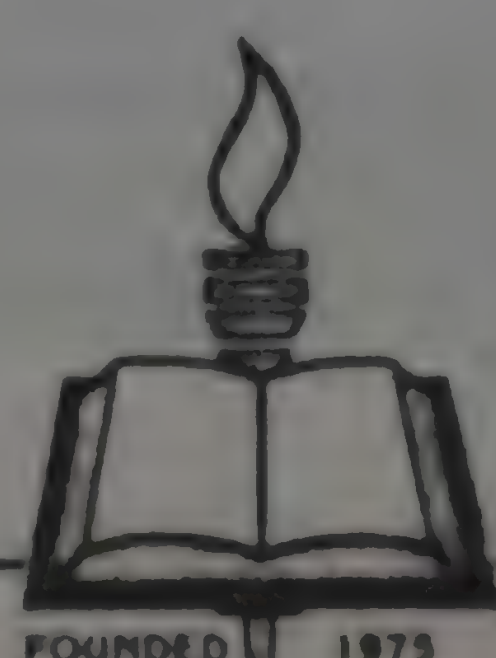
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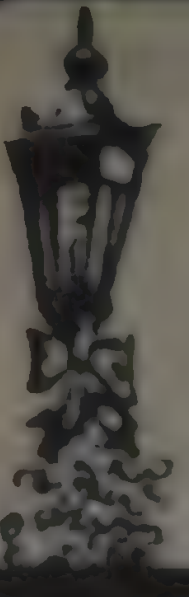
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Home for Christmas

Cathy Pater

The essence of Christmas is anticipation. Looking forward not only to the miracle of Christmas day itself, but the wonder of the days heralding the birth of Jesus blended with the nostalgia of Christmases past, fill us with a sense of expectation and well being.

Preparations are made well in advance with the same feelings of joy and excitement. As the days grow closer, our eagerness grows as well. Our homes are filled with a festive aura of promise. Holiday decorations, mingled with the tantalizing smells of traditional Christmas baking, envelop us with an air of expectancy. Christmas pageants at school and Sunday school add that extra excitement so well-expressed by children. They cannot wait for Christmas; the wonder and awe of it all is so beautifully illustrated in their expectations. The burdens of a grownup world cannot restrict their inner joy.

Many years ago when our children were young, our expectations were

shattered by the sudden death of my father-in-law, four days before Christmas. The news, amidst the coziness of a winter's evening as the children patiently watched their father repair a broken toy, transformed our festivities into a mockery. Nothing mattered anymore.

The funeral was held the day before Christmas; it was a cold, blustery afternoon. Our perception of Christmas that year had indeed changed. But it also brought us closer to the true essence of Christmas.

We all anticipate the joys of Christmas, but it is the *Christ* in Christmas that we must anticipate. My father-in-law, a child of God, was Home for Christmas. Unfettered by worldly cares he can now truly enjoy the Christ in Christmas.

Cathy Pater lives in Erin, Ontario.



Photo: Anne Hatten

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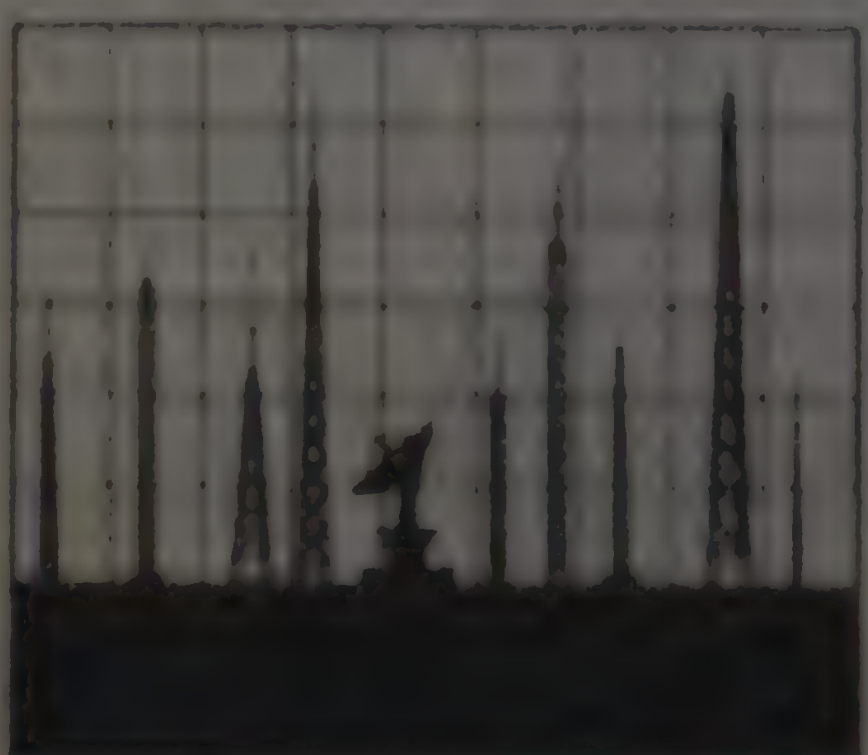
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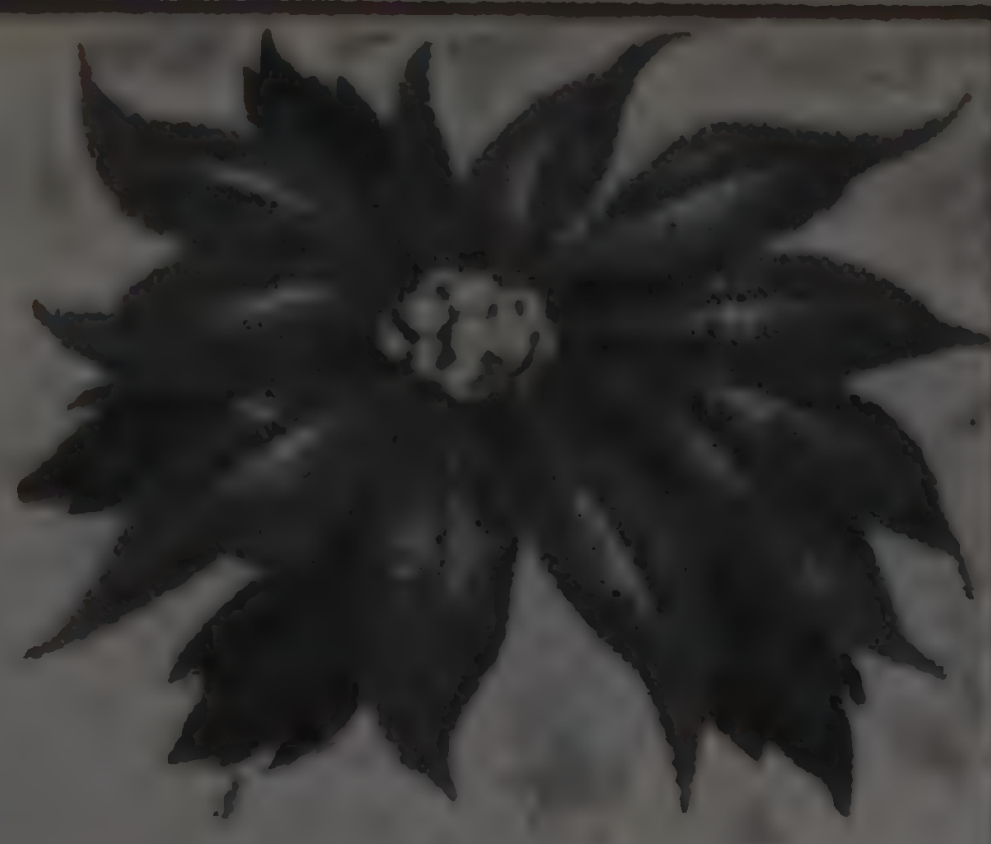
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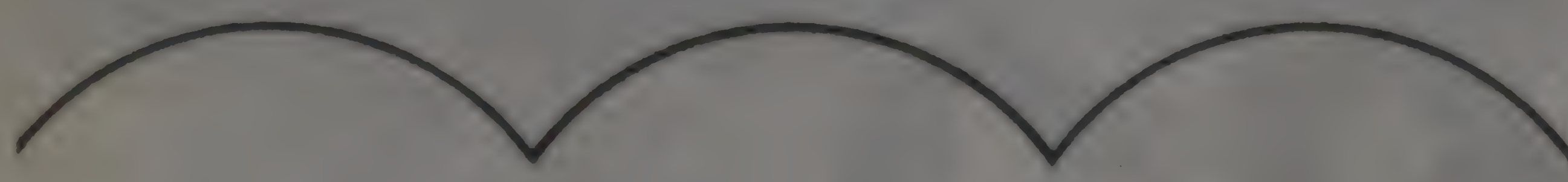
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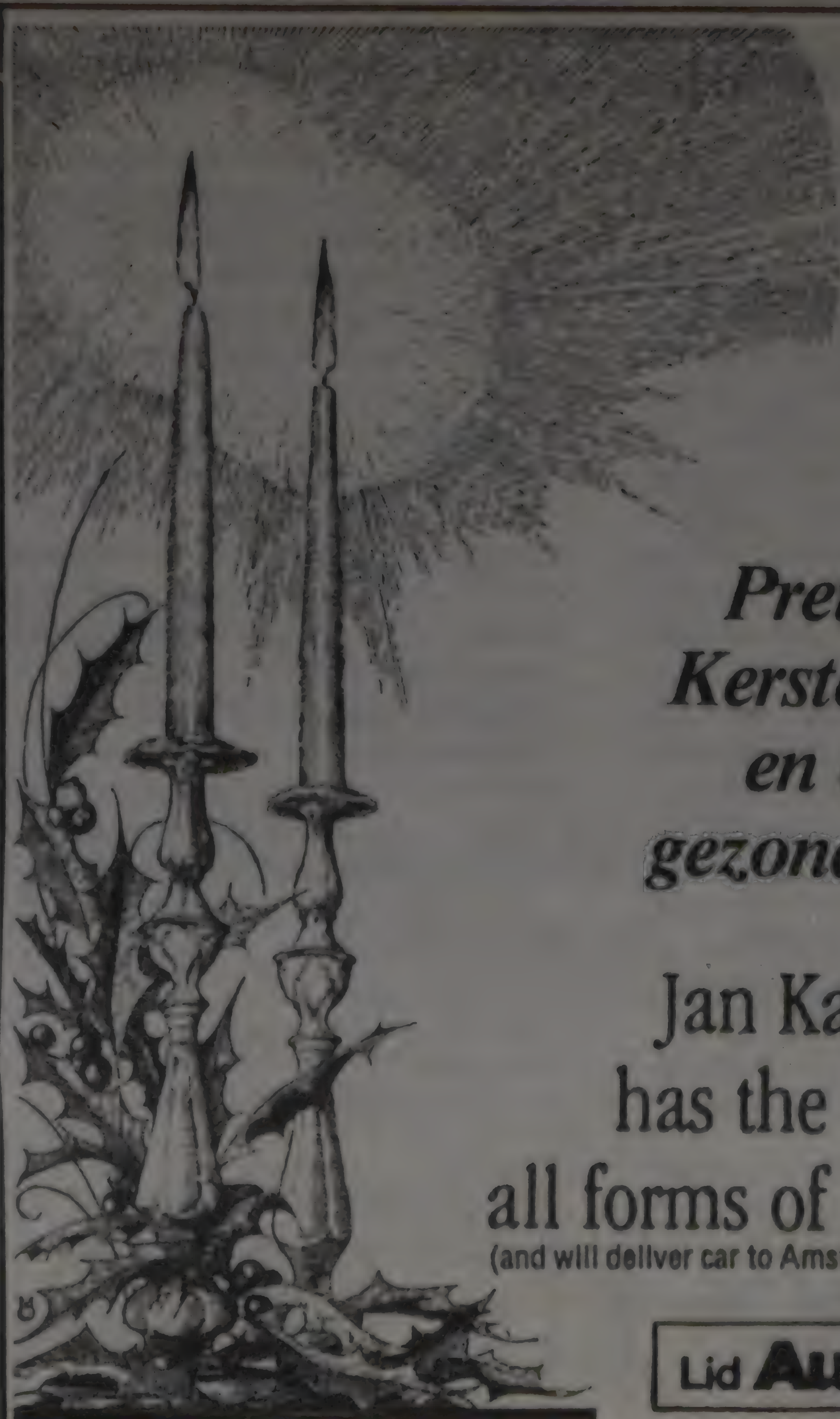


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Like a child G. Roger Schoenhals

In his red, footed pyjamas, Jonathan crawled in among the pile of presents under the Christmas tree. He turned, sat down and looked out through the strands of tinsel. Then he reached up and fingered one of the shiny bulbs.

I watched and wondered. Sitting there among the presents, my seven-month-old son seemed to belong. He was, to us, a gift from God.

My mind travelled back to that first Christmas in Bethlehem and God's gift of his only Son. Jesus came not as a full-grown man, but as a child. He laid in a manger, vulnerable and dependent.

It occurred to me that God's gift included not *only* his Son, but also an example for us to follow in our relationship with him. Jesus said, "Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." (Luke 18:17 RSV)

Christmas, then, can be a time not only to rejoice in the birth of the Christ Child, it can be a special season to study the little ones about us. Through them we can freshly discover the characteristics our Father desires to see

in us.

Here are seven qualities of childlike-ness I have observed in the early years of my four children. I pass these along as "starter blocks" to get you going in your own adventure of observing children at Christmas.

• **Dependent.** Children are unable to care for themselves. They must rely on adults for protection, for provision and for instruction. Mom or dad must wash them, dress them and care for their hurts. They are vulnerable, powerless. They may even need help opening their presents.

We please God when we come to Him in the spirit of dependence, looking to him for his fatherly care.

• **Transparent.** We can see right through children. If happiness is there, it shows. If anger is there, we see it. Whatever is going on in those little heads, their faces tell the story.

We adults tend to hide our feelings; we hide behind our masks. But children are wonderfully unpretentious. They are uncomplicated, obvious.

God delights in our honesty. He



wants us to be open with ourselves, with one another, and with him. Children, at Christmas, can remind us to be more transparent.

• **Innocent.** Children are unwise in the ways of the world. They are unsophisticated, gullible, naive. They have not experienced the range and frequency of deceitful deeds. Though sinners by birth, they are yet innocent in many ways.

God wants us to be as children in this sordid world. We are to blush in the face of immorality, and run from the presence of evil. We are to be "blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation." (Phil. 2:15 RSV)

• **Wide-eyed.** Sometimes it's more fascinating to watch the face of a child looking at a sunset, than to see the sky itself; or to study a child as he or she watches the lights blink on the tree. Children have that marvelous capacity to gape and gasp. They "oooo" and "ahhhh" with ease.

Too often we adults take God and his world for granted. We reveal the loss of simple astonishment, the absence of amazement. We pray to the God of the universe as if He were an old college friend. We look at the star-spattered sky and yawn.

God wants us to say, "WOW!"

• **Teachable.** Children are like sponges. They soak up whatever their adult leaders say and do. They are impressionable, mouldable, pliable. They have not reached the point of knowing more than mom or dad. They seek answers with annoying frequency: "Why this? Why that? Why? Why? Why?"

God is not put off by our questions. Rather, He desires to teach us and to guide us. He tells us: ask, seek, knock.

• **Eager.** Young children are eager beavers. They are ready to go with us anywhere, anytime. They want to be where the action is; they are eager to please; they are enthusiastic; they can't wait until Christmas morning to open the presents.

God likes that kind of responsiveness. He wants us to stand on our tiptoes, zealous to learn his will, eager to do it.

• **Trusting.** Children display simple faith. They readily accept whatever mom or dad says. They leap into space, knowing outstretched arms will save them. Without wavering, without wondering, they believe. They accept our stories about Santa Claus coming down the chimney — or the truth about Jesus in the manger.

The Bible calls us to "trust in the Lord with all your heart." (Prov. 3:5a RSV) Repeatedly we are exhorted to exercise our faith; to believe. Children can teach us how.

Christmas is coming and children will be in the midst of it all. Through some of their words and ways we can perceive what God wants of us. And, in turn, we can offer to our Father the gift of a childlike heart. We can affirm our dependence on God, our transparency before him, our innocence in the world, our wide-eyed wonder at his glory, our openness to his guidance, our eagerness to serve him, and our simple faith in his Word.

G. Roger Schoenhals lives in Seattle, Washington.

Christmas celebration

Celebrate with me
Now abundantly
Jesus' birth today!

Friendly is His face
Full of grace His voice,
Leaving us no choice.

Let us bring a gift
As the wise men do;
Worship Him our King.

Follow Him we must
Till we turn to dust
Far past Bethlehem.

Let us speed to see
Who this King may be;
Shepherds lead the way.

Singing as we go
For He loves us so;
We can't help ourselves.

Bethlehem seems far
And we see no star;
Not a single ray.

Beyond Calvary
Lies our destiny;
Now we're getting close.

Tempted to give up
As the road gets rough,
We slow down a bit.

Just around the bend
We will reach the end
Of our life's long road.

Then one Shepherd turns
Quietly; He stands
Holding out His hands.

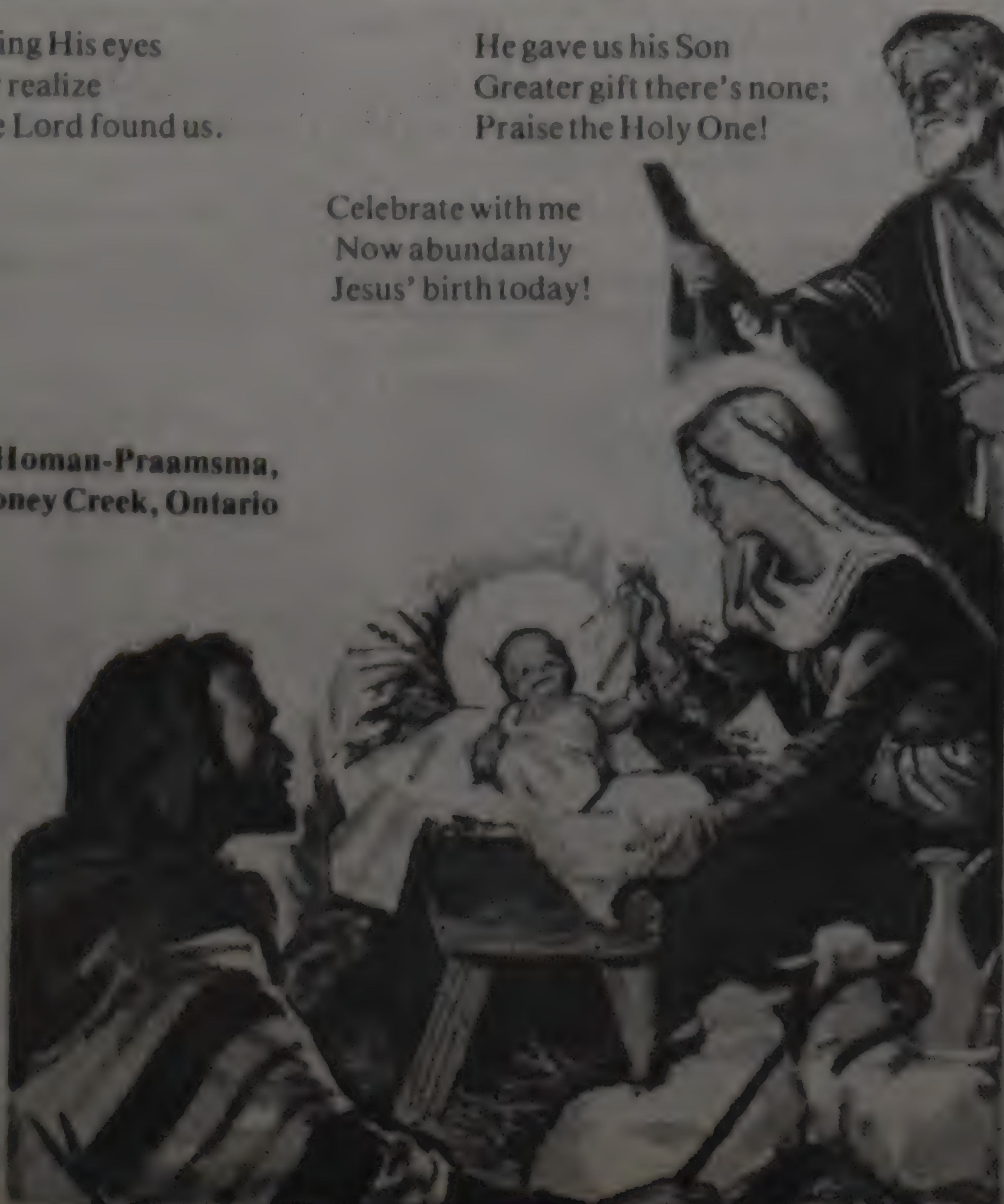
If our gift is love
God says that's enough,
For that's all He wants.

Examining His eyes
We now realize
That the Lord found us.

He gave us his Son
Greater gift there's none;
Praise the Holy One!

Celebrate with me
Now abundantly
Jesus' birth today!

Eline Homan-Praamsma,
Stoney Creek, Ontario



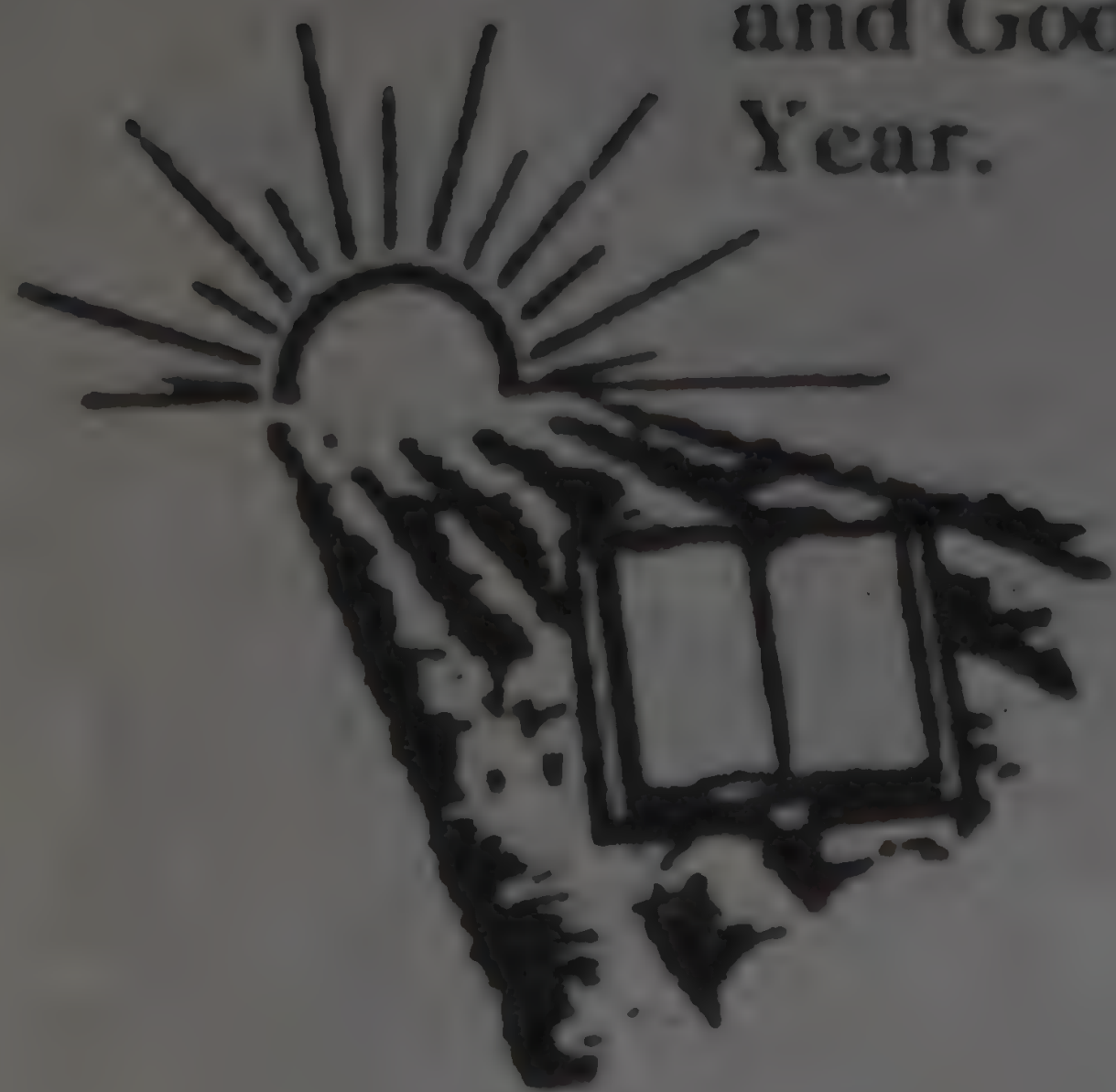
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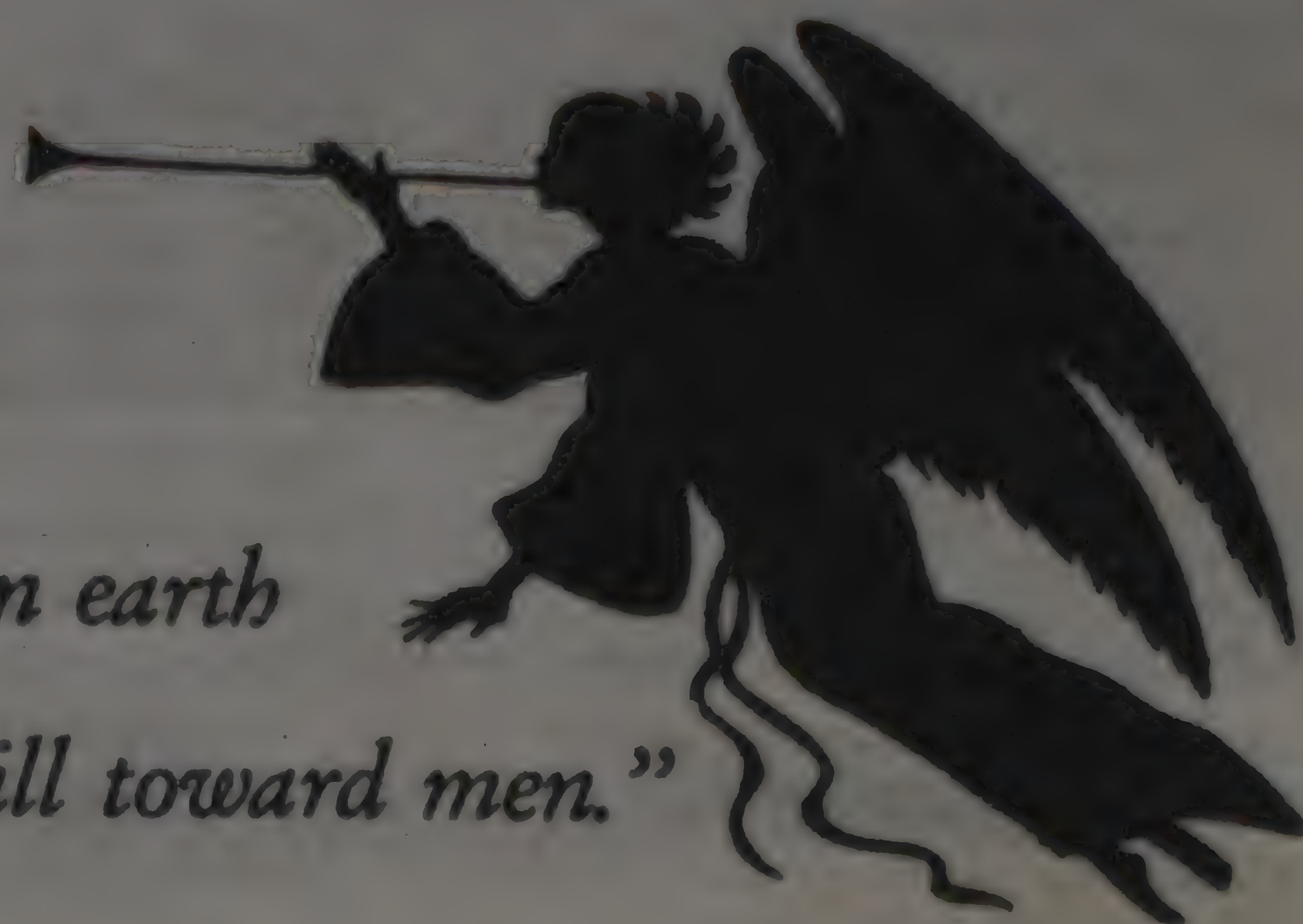
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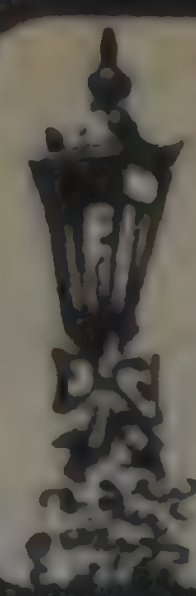
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On the threshold of a new century: Christmas Eve 1999

John Martens



The advance listening post high on the ice-covered plateau of north-central Greenland is only one in a chain of such strategically located positions spread across arctic North America.

There in the eternal silence reigning on Greenland's ice cap, approximately 100 miles north of Thule, the enormous American base, a team of military experts — hardy young men — keeps a continuous watch towards the north.

Their advanced television cameras and radio antennae are aimed north, where beyond the geographical North Pole, along the shores of islands off the Siberian coast, the Russians had built a similar network of highly sensitive military listening posts.

In his arctic hut, where he never strayed far from his listening gear, Bill Delaney was thinking of home and Christmas preparations. He longed to be there now with his wife and young son. This was to be the last Christmas of the 20th century, a memorable occasion indeed. He imagined how he and his wife would show their little boy pictures from the children's Bible: Jesus in the manger, Mary and Joseph with the donkey, other animals in the stable; gorgeously dressed kings from afar, some with dark skin, and shepherds (with crooked staffs) bending on one knee before the little child while whispering excitedly to each other.

Bill thought how happy his aging parents would be to lay eyes on their eldest son again. His younger brothers would want to hear all about Greenland's permanent winter darkness, about the polar bears and the mysterious Russians dwelling over the arctic horizon.

Bill listened. Not much else to do here. All around was darkness, Polar night, and silence. His radio receiver emitted a short beep and then another one; nothing unusual. And then it was quiet as before. He reached for the switch on his television camera, an amazing apparatus that picked up evidence of everything that went on up to nearly a thousand miles away.

It was part of Bill's task to monitor what the camera recorded at specific intervals — what was going on up north on the other side of the Pole. His TV camera was aimed at two Russian listening posts at the northern end of Novaya Zemlja. The camera automatically recorded the received

pictures and twice a week an all-weather helicopter picked up the films for evaluation at intelligence headquarters at Thule.

Another beep came over the radio receiver, followed by a series of long whistles. Listening intently through his headset, however, Bill did not hear any Russian conversation. He suspected they might try to trick him into listening, to divert his attention while they relayed important information to their own headquarters via a different channel.

Taking off his earphones, Bill opened a flap in the side of his arctic hut. He thought he heard the drone of plane engines. Then, far to the north, the faint buzz of powerful engines was unmistakable. It grew in intensity and then it faded again until all was quiet once more in the arctic night. As peaceful as it must have been when God had finished creating the world, when only the birds sang and the other animals joined Adam and Eve in guileless laughter, Bill mused.

But even here in the polar night there was life. Overhead, the stars shine brilliantly, sparkling from an intensely dark firmament. They looked so close and bright that Bill thought he might touch them. The impressive *Ursa Major* (the Great Bear) dominated the northern sky. And somewhere, Bill knew, Nanook, the polar bear, was hibernating. Somewhere in the icy wastes he was waiting out the winter darkness; when the first glimmerings of light returned to the Arctic, Nanook and his kind would be on the prowl. Then

the occupants of the listening posts had better be careful: Nanook had been the master of the Arctic for uncounted ages and he suffered no competitors.

Yes, for Bill Delaney, this Christmas eve of 1999 promised to be a lonely one. He realized that just as he must spend this final Christmas of the rapidly waning 20th century alone under the arctic stars, so he was going to greet the 21st century alone. The thought of it momentarily overwhelmed him. But his sense of duty kept him going.

Suddenly, at five minutes before midnight, the radio receiver began to beep, this time incessantly.

Putting the headset back on, Bill listened with astonishment as a sonorous voice with Russian accent in otherwise faultless English tried to make contact. Betraying a slight tremor, the voice said with urgency, "American friend, listen to me for a moment while we can talk safely. Right now we are experiencing here in the north of Siberia a display of *Aurora Borealis* (the Northern Lights). You know as well as I do that under the attending atmospheric conditions it is safe for me to contact you because my call cannot be monitored. I have wanted to do this for a long time.

"You remember I tried making contact almost a month ago? I had to stop abruptly when *Aurora borealis* suddenly disappeared and I was in danger of being discovered. Now I can talk to you. But if I stop in mid-sentence, know then that the Northern Lights have suddenly disappeared.

Right now, I can still see them reflecting on the snowdrifts outside."

Bill acknowledged the call. He indeed remembered how last month that unmistakably Russian voice had called on him. There had only been a few words. At the time, Bill shrugged it off as another of his counterparts' attempts to mislead him. This time, however, there was more time for the far-away caller to have his say. Bill listened with surprise to the words of his Russian colleague.

"American friend, I know this is to you the most important time of the year. On this evening, on what you call Christmas eve, in this last year of the 20th century which saw our two countries rise to undreamt of pinnacles of power, I wish you happiness and fond thoughts. I know you must think of your loved ones at home as I often do myself.

"And now we have to amuse ourselves here all by ourselves in the meagre light of the northern stars."

As the Russian continued, Bill concentrated even greater attention on his words. The unknown speaker was saying, "I know tomorrow you celebrate the birth of a Prince of Peace, whom you honour. And so do I myself, for his name is not unknown in my country and is revered by many of my compatriots. Know then that to this Prince of Peace, I also render homage. But in my country it is better not to publicly refer to him."

When Bill was able to collect his thoughts, he told his unknown caller that he was delighted to share with him the mood of Christmas eve and the spirit of peace, but above all, a respectful remembrance of the birth of the Prince of Peace.

Then Bill asked his Russian counterpart if he knew the gospel story of Jesus' birth in another night long ago — a night in which, in the imagination of most of us, a star-studded sky was the backdrop for a host of singing angels.

But whether it was clear or raining that birth night does not matter. And in the same way, the arctic darkness of the polar night could not prevent two young men from sharing a common desire for peace and goodwill.

Hurriedly now, the Russian told Bill about himself. He knew indeed of the gospel narrative.



Illustrations for this article from: Northern Frontiers, Northern Homeland

Continued on page 31 ...

May the love, hope and peace of
Christmas be with all our friends,
relatives and customers
now and throughout the New Year.

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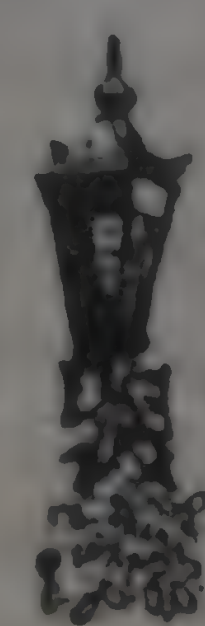
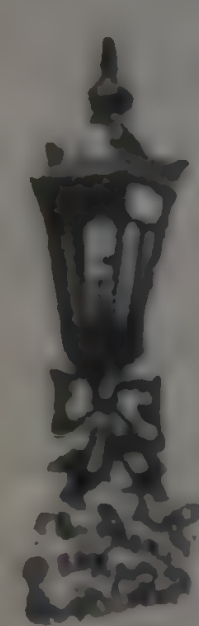
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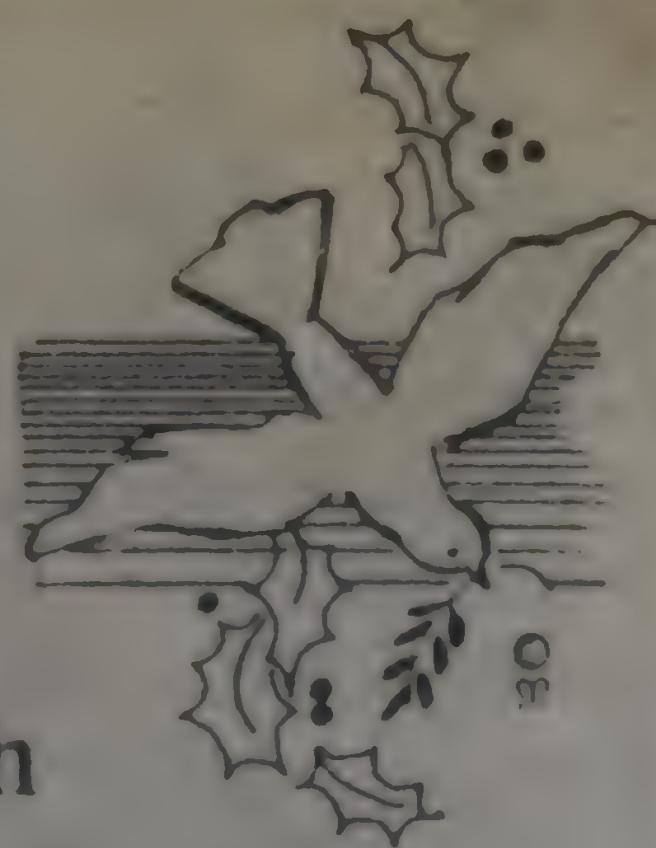
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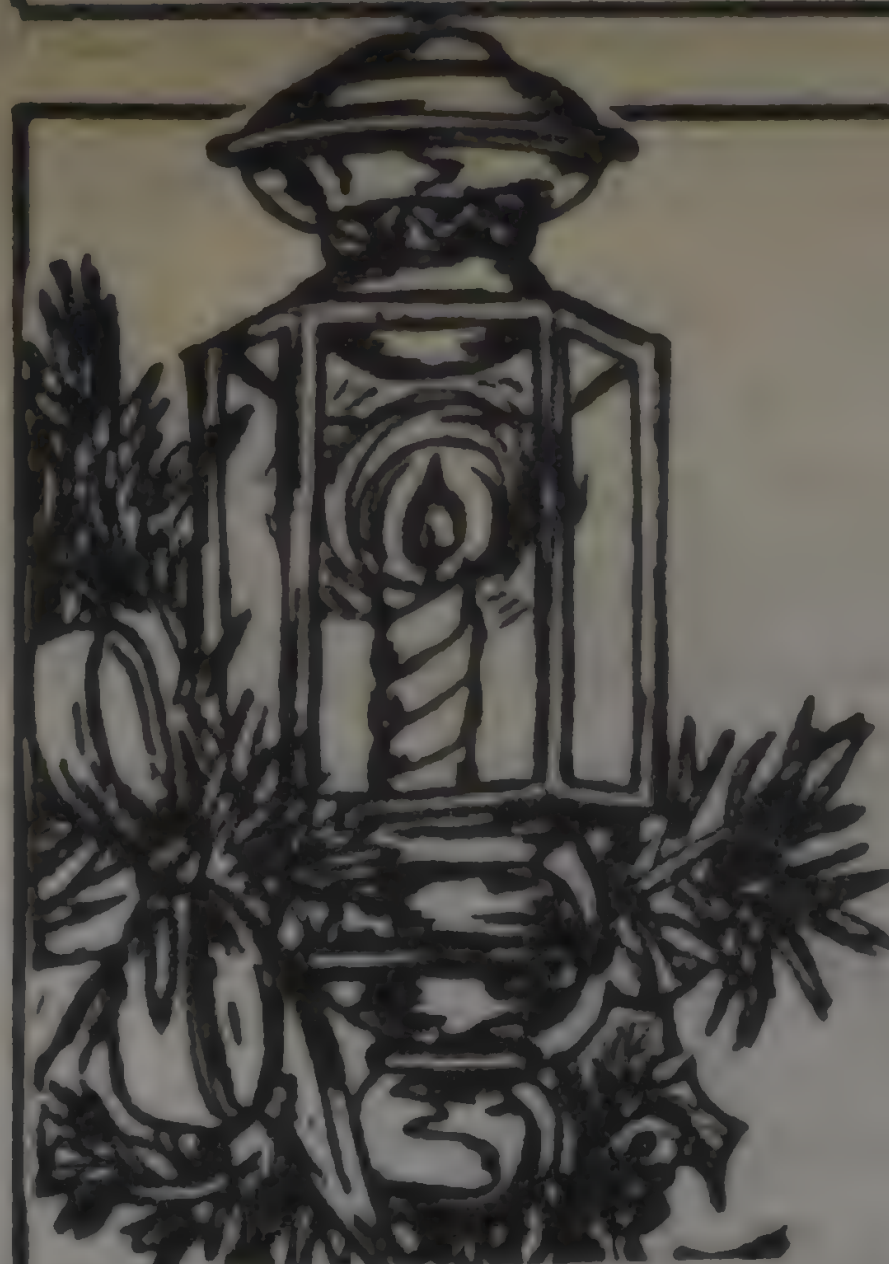
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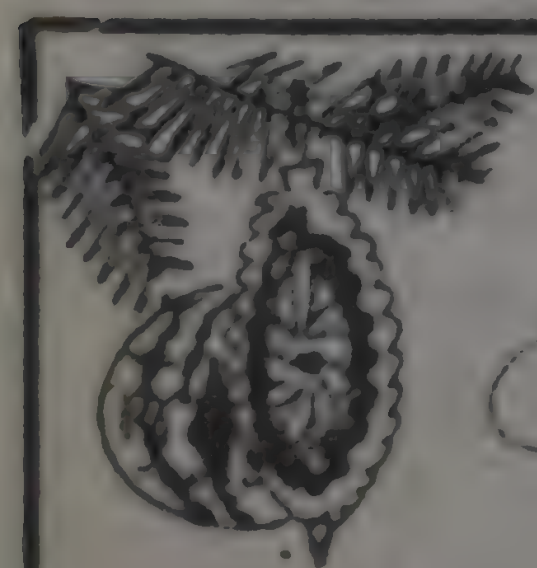
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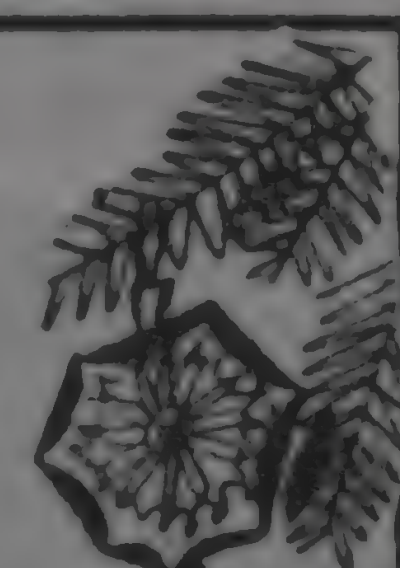
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On the threshold of a new century: Christmas eve 1999 (Continued)

... continued from page 29.

"Hundreds of years ago — in fact, over 700 years ago — my forebears were deported to the Altai Mountains of Central Asia from Germany by the invading Mongol hordes from the East. The Mongols were finally driven back after the battle of Liegniz, Siberia, in A.D. 1254. But first they had transferred thousands of German artisans and miners to what is now Soviet Central Asia. The Germans had been very useful to the Mongols through their skills as smiths and armourers. Thus, they were allowed to settle in their own villages, preserving their language, culture and Christian religion.

After many years, the region where they were resettled by the Mongols became part of the Russian Empire. Their descendants became Russian citizens.

During the sixteenth century, specimens of Luther's Bible had reached the German settlers in the Altai mountains. Somehow contact with their homeland had never completely ceased.

And so, the Russian told Bill, many a family still possessed an ancient German Bible, and that's how the story of Jesus' birth was known to young and old. Bill was astonished on hearing the Russian's dramatic account of his people's past.

Urgently, more hurriedly came the Russian's voice now: "It seems that the Northern Lights are beginning to wane; expect me to stop abruptly any moment,

American friend. Think of me now and then. I love peace and I know you do. I love, with you, the Prince of Peace, of whom Luther's Bible and your scriptures speak. Perhaps we can talk again. Or perhaps we never will, but

There was a sudden, sharp crackle and a long whistle from the receiver. Then silence.

Bill looked out through the hut's little window. Was that the sound of plane engines again in the north? Or was it the wind howling louder? Tomorrow would be Christmas day and a new century would dawn. Would it be Christmases of hope and a century of peace after the blood-soaked 20th century? Bill was sure his Russian counterpart was one with him and others in longing for a world where "peace on earth" was a reality and not just a piously mumbled catchphrase to be repeated each Christmas season.

There was a short beep from the radio receiver. Bill donned his headset. There was no follow-up. But two young men in the Arctic had shared a common vision of peace and hope, drawing on the simple story of the birth of Christ, the Prince of Peace. Simple and old that story may be, but also a living, unperishable story for our century and centuries to follow.

John Martens was a free-lance writer and lived in Listowel, Ontario.



God in a box

Dedicated to Luci Shaw and Calvin Seerveld who inspired me to use my word playfulness allusively.



God
how could You
be-little Yourself?
How allow
Yourself
to become wrapped in the womb
of one of Your children?
— And then,
when there was no more room,
to be born to a world
which had no room for You either.

You became one of us,
letting Yourself be
stabled,
cradled
by wood,
in birth
as You were in death,
Naked You were born
and naked You died.
Second Adam
You had no reason to be ashamed.
The heavenly Sower
made no fig leaf apron for You.

In Bethlehem
You were exposed to only a few:
Mary, Your mother
— yet daughter and sister as well —
how did she feel
knowing she had to bear You
so that You could bear her sin?
And Joseph
— stepping in as father —
did this carpenter know
his son would be framed
by wood?
Shepherds knelt at Your feet;
did they know
You were to be
their Shepherd
as well as their Sheep?
Wise men found You
magi-cally.
Was it their Wisdom
which led them
Solomon-ly
to the Wisest One of all?

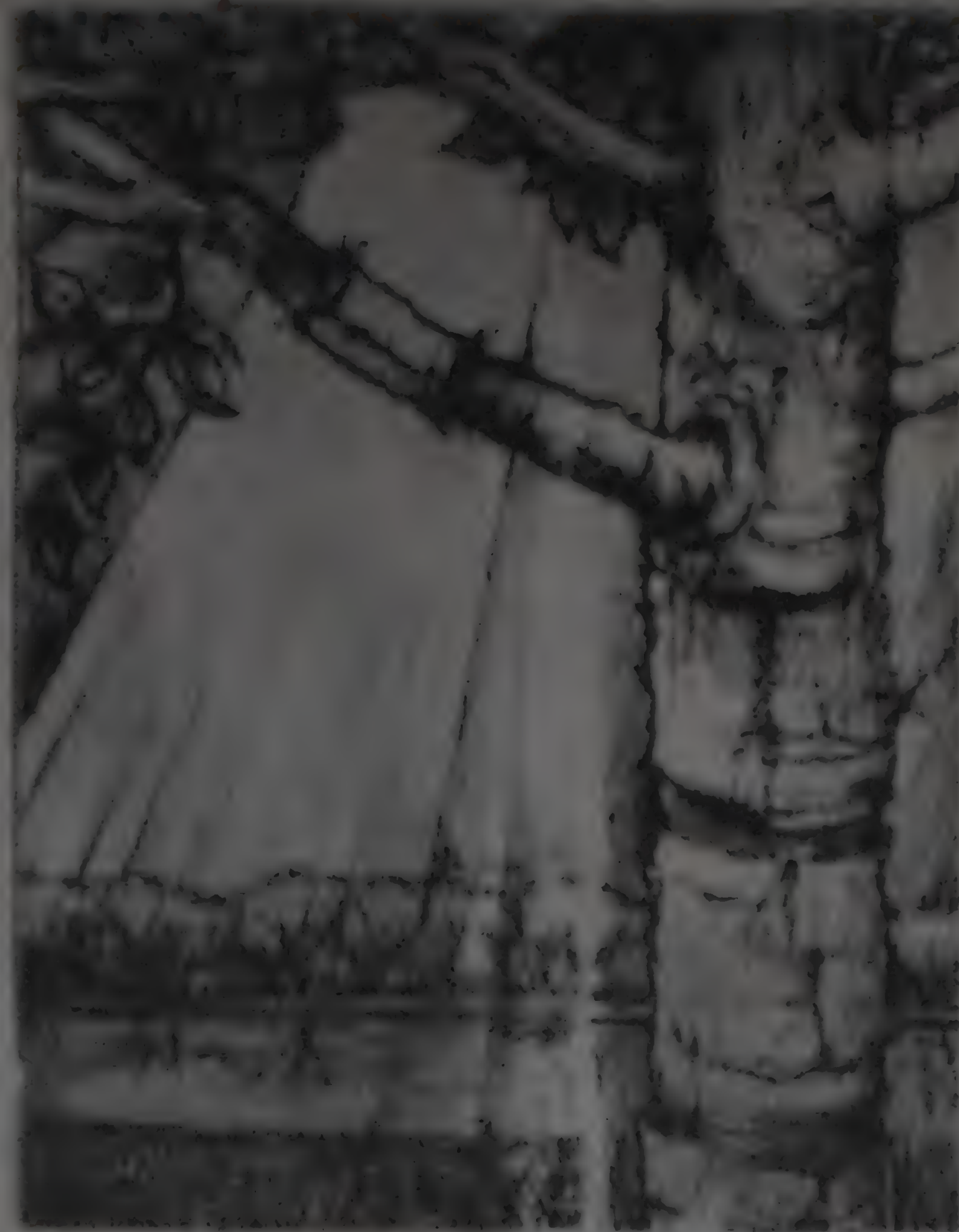
You were boxed in then
swaddled
in (our) dirty linen
and lying in a mangy trough.
Vainly
the world tries to shut You up;
to tell You what You're like
or should be like
or should like.
The world takes out
the box marked "Jesus!"
only at Christmas time
when You become
the icing on the Christmas cake,
sharing it with snow and bells
and a fat man in red.
Your birthday becomes
not a holy day,
but a holly day,
drunk to
by a society suffering from Santa-fication.

Thank You God
that since Bethlehem
You won't be put in a box,
with strings attached
by us.
Satan would hold us too —
like hell!
But You have broken
the bands of death
— our bondage.
Naked we come before You
covered in sin,
our shame.
But You have clothed us
in the swaddling cloths
of Jesus' righteousness!
You see us
and say
"IT IS GOOD."

*Janette Fernando,
Moutrose, Australia*

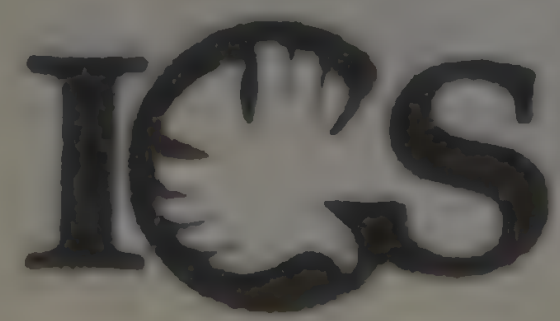
There shoots a sprout out of the
stump of Jesse!
A new growth out of the old
roots, and it will bear fruit!
The Spirit of Yahweh shall rest
upon him:
the spirit of wisdom and insight,
the spirit of considered counsel
and restful strength,
a knowing spirit,
a spirit of fearing the Lord God
Yahweh shall settle down
upon him.
And he will be just glad to be
fearing the Lord Yahweh!

Isaiah 11:1-3
Translated by
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as we celebrate the coming of Christ
to us!

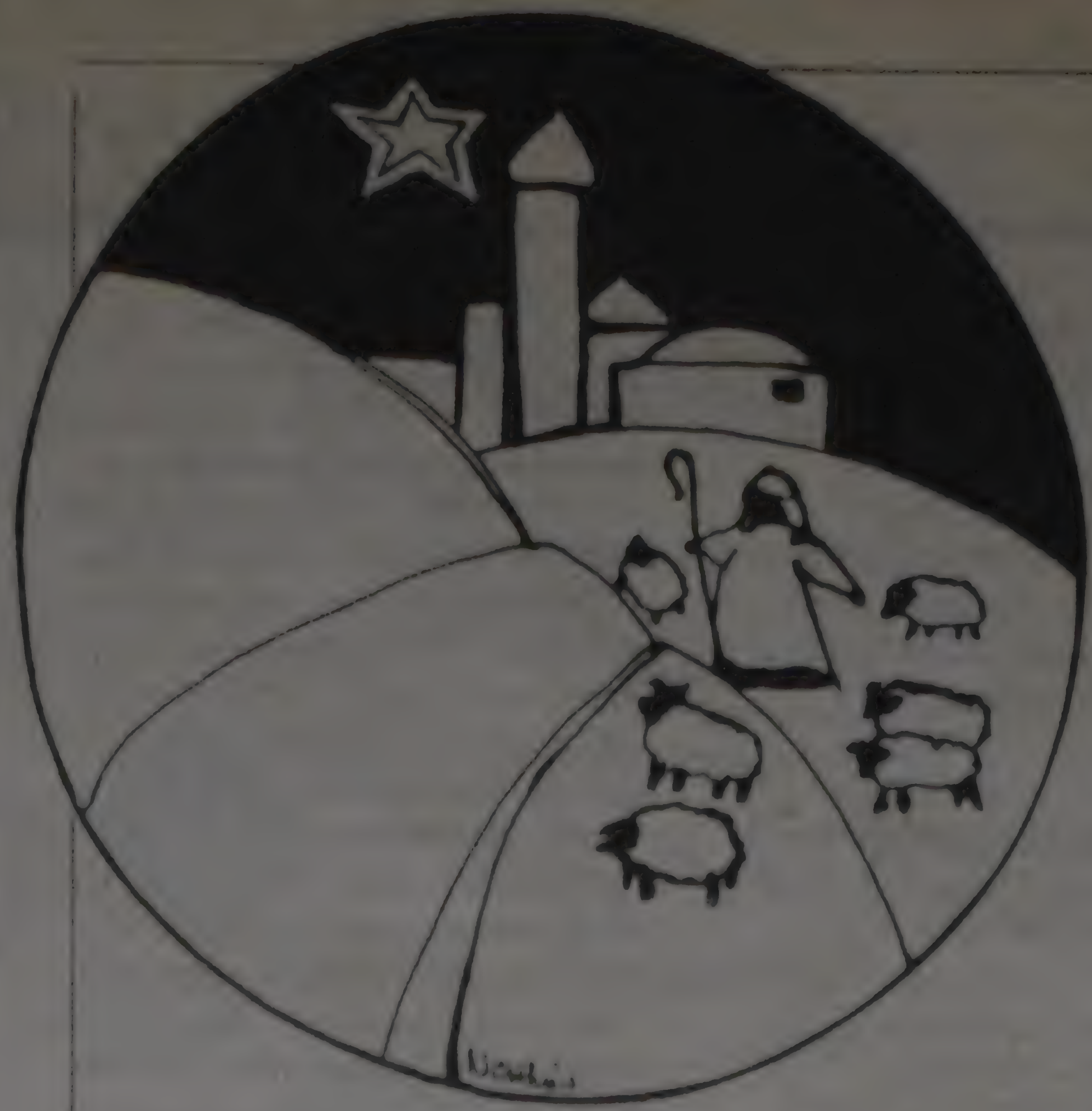


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Classifieds

Christmas Greetings	Christmas Greetings	Anniversaries	Anniversaries	Obituaries
<p>BEUTE: We wish our large circle of family and many friends a blessed Christmas and God's peace in the New Year. Jake and Theresa</p>	<p>UIL: We wish all our family and friends a blessed Christmas and God's peace in the New Year. Freda Uil and Andy, Clinton, Ont.</p>	<p>Rijnsburg Thunder Bay 1942 December 22 1987 With joy and thanksgiving to our Lord, we are happy to announce the 45th anniversary of our parents and grandparents. JEREMIAS and JELTJE DE VRIES (nee Van der Veen) We pray that the Lord will continue to bless and keep them in his care. Congratulations and love from your children and grandchildren: Joanne & Peter Wassenaar; Jeanette, Sharon, Connie, Christy, Lynda — Murillo, Ont. Bill & Corry De Vries; Jerry, Anita, Jennifer, Alena — Thunder Bay, Ont. Wilma & Henry Dekker; Sandy, Brian, Wesley, Mandy — Chilliwack, B.C. Home address: R.R.#6, Thunder Bay, ON P7C5N5</p>	<p>1947 December 18 1987 With thanks to our Lord, we are happy to announce the 40th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents. JACK and JOANNE THALEN Congratulations from their children and grandchildren: Harry & Jenny Thalen; Trevor, Rachel, Natasha — Guelph Nellie & Frank Bergman; Jason, Dennis, Clinton — Woodstock Eric & Sandy Thalen; Aaron, Jessie, Nicole — Vancouver, B.C. Jack & Jennifer Thalen; Joel, Jocelyn, Ashley — Guelph Hilda & John van Gysse; Mathew, Jeffrey — Drayton Joanne & Bruce Adema; Rebecca, Justin — Grand Rapids, MI Open house will be held in the First Chr. Ref. Church, Water St., Guelph, Ont., from 2 o'clock to 4:30 on Saturday, Dec. 19. Best wishes only, please. Home address: 82 Cedar St., Guelph, ON N1G 1C5</p>	<p>On Nov. 17, 1987, the Lord took to his home and to his glory. PETRUS (Peter) BONNEMA at the age of 75 years. Beloved husband of Anna Bonnema. Dear father and grandfather of: Emely & Darrell Ness; Melissa, Nicole Gerald & Tsoi Yen; Shera-Lynn, Peter, Kindra, Ronald Jake & Bertha; Sandra, Patricia, Keven, Michael Corry & Peter Kuchar; Jason, Dennis, Mara, Natasia Henny & Leroy McDavid; Jacqueline, Jacob, Darrin, Daniel, Anna and one sister Catrien and Bert Steen — Belleville, South Africa Funeral services on Friday, Nov. 19 at the Third Chr. Ref. Church. Rev. S. de Waal officiated. 13119 - 124 Ave., Edmonton, AB T5L 2Z9</p>
<p>DE JONG: "... but you received the spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children ... heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ ..." (Romans 8). Best wishes to all our friends and relatives for a joy-filled Christmas and a peaceful New Year. Stan and Corrie de Jong, 2 Sullivan Dr., St. Catharines, ON L2N 1K2</p>	<p>WITVOET: To all our good-looking friends: Christ became you - that you become Him you see thus being each other you are quite becoming agree? Happy Christmas and New Year! Bert and Alice Witvoet, St. Catharines, Ont.</p>	<p>Thankful to the Lord, we hope to celebrate our 35th wedding anniversary on Saturday, the 19th of Dec., 1987. We are inviting family and friends to an open house from 2-4 in the afternoon on that day. SINY and JOHN PRINZEN Daphne & Rick (fiance) Wesley Home address: 2015 Heaton Rd., R.R.#2, Burlington, ON L7R 3X5 Best wishes only.</p>	<p>Westerbork Smithville 1952 December 4 1987 "... where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord ..." (Ps. 121:1b-2a) We praise and thank the Lord for blessing our parents and grandparents with 35 years together, GEORGE (Gerrit) and FRANCES (Froukje) VOS (nee Zwaagstra and it is our prayer that He will continue to bless us all as a family. Loving children and grandchildren: Arthur & Tina Vos; Michelle, Sherry, Amanda, Gerrit — Smithville, Ont. Adrian & Jane Vanderwier; Leona, Hugh, Gayle, Gerrit, Richard, John — Smithville, Ont. Ron & Wilma Acaster; Natasha, Trina, Jacob, Jordyn — Fenwick, Ont. Lloyd & Glenda Vos — Smithville, Ont. At home: George Vos Paul Vos John Vos Jennifer Vos Home address: R.R.#2, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0</p>	<p>"The Lord is compassionate and gracious ..." (Psalm 103:8-22) After a lengthy illness, the Lord took home our dear husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather on Nov. 16, 1987, ANDRIES KAMSTRA at the age of 79 years. Predeceased by Mintje Kamstra (nee De Vlas), 1982, and grandson Geoffery, 1975. Wife: Rie Kamstra-Witteveen. Children: Sytse & Janny Kamstra — Franeker, The Neth. Riek & Bill Ryan — Hamilton, Ont. Frank & Tina Kamstra — Stroud, Ont. Harry & Janny Kamstra — Kleinburg, Ont. John & Marilyn Kamstra — Tottenham, Ont. Pat & Henk Hemmen — Emmen, The Neth. Jake & Mary Kamstra — Bradford, Ont. Ray Kamstra — Tottenham, Ont. Mike & Pam Kamstra — Woodbridge, Ont. Peter & Rose Kamstra — Schomberg, Ont. 32 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Peter & Fay Witteveen Shirley Witteveen & Denny Morin Sonya & Cecil Foster William & Lynn Witteveen and five grandchildren. Funeral services were held on Nov. 18, 1987, at Scott's Funeral Home, Woodbridge, Ont. Rev. H. Praamsma officiated. Home address: 26 Hallow Cr., Rexdale, ON M9W 2V9</p>
<p>HARTMAN: We wish all our family and friends a blessed Christmas and God's peace in the New Year. J. and J. Hartman, 302 York Rd., Dundas, ON L9H 5N3</p>	<p>Classified Rates Births \$22.00 Marriages & Engagements \$25.00 Anniversaries \$30.00 Obituaries \$30.00 Notes of thanks \$21.00 Birthdays \$20.00 All other one-column classified advertisements: \$7.50 per column inch with a minimum of \$10. For letter under file number, \$10 extra. Photos: \$7.50 additional charge. (Free when published with anniversary announcement celebrating 50 years or more.) Calvinist Contact will not be responsible for any errors due to hand-written or phoned-in advertisements. NOTE: Newlyweds whose wedding announcement with their future address appears in Calvinist Contact will receive a letter offering a first-year subscription for only \$10! To facilitate matters, we encourage those who request and pay for the wedding announcement to enclose \$10 and the couple's future address. Note our new address: Calvinist Contact Publishing Ltd., 261 Martindale Rd., Unit 4, St. Catharines, ON L2R 6P9</p>	<p>1962 December 14 1987 With gratitude to God for his abiding love and faithfulness, we will celebrate the 25th wedding anniversary of our parents, WILLIAM and ELIZABETH TAVENIER "For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." (Psalm 100) Praise be to God for parents through whom we may experience love and grow in the counsel of his way. "We love because He first loved us." (1 Jn. 4) Ella Dan Jo-Ann Home address: 1271 Mathie Rd., Prince George, B.C. V2K 1B3</p>	<p>Obituaries 1907 Psalm 42 1987 Suddenly, on Nov. 14, yet at his appointed time, it pleased the Lord to take to himself our very dear mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, HENDRIKA EVERDINA GEURKINK (nee Bosman) Beloved wife of the late Johan Geurkink. Dear mother of: Grace & James Kolff — Iroquois Arie & Jennie Geurkink — Iroquois Henry & Jessie Geurkink — Brnston Johanna & Gerrit Westervelt — Brnston John & Coral Geurkink — Iroquois Dear Oma of 23 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren. Predeceased by one grandson in 1978. Funeral service was held Nov. 17, in the Chr. Ref. Church of Williamsburg, Ont. Pastor Walter De Ruiter officiating. Brnston, ON K0E 1C0</p>	<p>After a lengthy illness, the Lord took to Himself, on Nov. 17, in his 38th year, ALLAN PRANGER We thank our heavenly Father for his many years of faithful service in our congregation as cadet counsellor, deacon and elder. We commend his family to God's loving care. O, Lord my God, how great Thou art. Council of the Calvin Christian Reformed Church, Ottawa, Ont. "Be still, and know that I am God." (Ps. 46:10) On Nov. 14, 1987, the Lord took to himself through a tragic accident, HARRY JOHN ROODE at the age of 29 years. The consistory of the Covenant Christian Reformed Church of Woodstock expresses their deepest sympathy to his parents Henry and Dianna and their family with this sudden loss. May the Lord comfort and sustain them in this time of mourning. For the consistory: Rev. R. Ouweland, Pres. M. Klingenberg, Clerk</p>
<p>HOUTMAN: The Houtman's; Harry, Tine, Heather, Ruth and Neil, wish all their relatives, friends and acquaintances a sense of the true meaning of Christmas and a blessed 1988. 45 Harriet St., Toronto, ON M4L 2G1</p>	<p>Marriages DOUMA-PETRUSMA: With thanks to the Lord, Mr. and Mrs. William Douma and Mr. and Mrs. George Petrusma are happy to announce the forthcoming marriage of their children, CHARLENE and GEORGE. The ceremony will take place, the Lord willing, on Saturday, Dec. 19, 1987, at 11:00 a.m., in the Rehoboth Chr. Ref. Church, in Bowmanville, Ont., with Pastor H. Wildeboer of Oshawa officiating. Future address: 32 The Bridge Path, Bowmanville, ON L1C 3W1</p>	<p>Real Estate Forsale A large duplex house in good condition and big barn and 34½ acres very good soil. Suitable for nursery, strawberries or other crops. We are located in Annapolis Valley near Kingston, N.S. Reason for sale is retirement of the owner. Asking price is \$82,000. Terra Nova Gardens. If interested contact: Central Trust Real Estate Telephone 902-678-7387 or write: 46 Webster St. Kentville, NS B4N 1H7</p>		
<p>KNIGHT: Greetings for the coming season and the year 1988, to all my relatives and friends. May the Lord bless you all! Gertrude Knight, Shalom Manor, Grimsby, Ont.</p>				
<p>LISE: We wish all our family and friends a blessed Christmas and a healthy and a happy New Year. Mr. and Mrs. Tom Lise, Box 245, Drayton, ON N0G 1P0</p>	<p>OUSSOREN-HAMILTON: In the spirit of Christian joy, JANNIE JOHANNA Oussoren and CHARLES WARREN Hamilton will pledge their lives to each other on Saturday, Dec. 19, 1987. We invite you to join us and our families in asking God's blessing on our marriage at two o'clock p.m., Burlington Chr. Ref. Church, 3422 New St., Burlington, Ont. Future address: 5280 Lakeshore Rd., #805, Burlington, ON L7L 5R1</p>			
<p>MELENBERG: We wish all our family and friends a blessed Christmas and the peace which passes all understanding for the coming year. Gerrit and Albertje</p>	<p>Classifieds continued next page.</p>			
<p>OOSTERHOFF: We wish all our family and friends a joyful Christmas and the Lord's blessings for the coming year. Piet and Auktje Oosterhoff</p>				
<p>SMIT: I wish all my family and friends, a blessed Christmas and God's peace in the New Year. Mrs. Bertha Smit, 50 Bail Blvd., #301, Richmond Hill, ON L4C 5L1</p>				

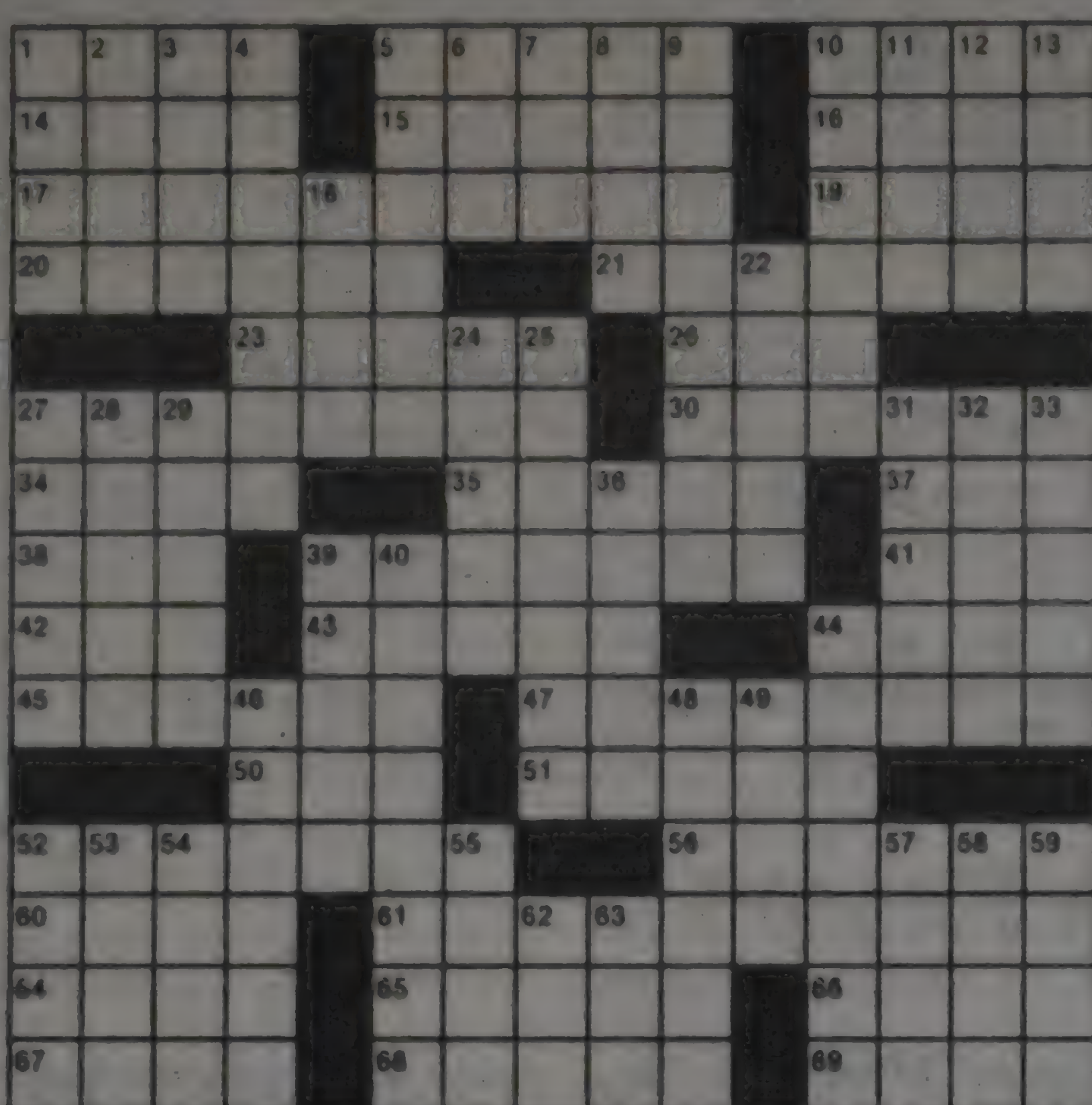
Classifieds

Real Estate	For Rent	For Rent	For Rent	For Rent
Three-bedroom split-level home for sale, completely redecorated this past spring; near Christian school and CR Church. If you are moving into the Cambridge area, this might be the home for you. Call (519) 621-4136.	House trailer in Bradenton, Florida, 35' by 8', from Mar. 28 till May 19, 1988. Adults only. J. Hartman, Gen. Delivery, P.O. Cortez, Florida 34215. Tel. 318-795-0458.	Florida-Gulf of Mexico: 2-bedroom condo, ideal family place in Indian Rocks, very private, heated pool, across road from beach. Available until Jan. 23, 1988. Rent rates U.S. \$350-500 per week. Phone Toronto: 226-1137 or 785-0794. Not available Dec. 19 to Jan. 2.	"WELLINGSTONE CHRISTIAN HOME" The Christian Home Association of Mount Hamilton has decided to add an additional 22 units to the original project of 30 senior citizen apartments. Applications for the leasing of these 22 apartments are now accepted on a first come, first serve basis. For more information, call or write: Mrs. F. Smink 198 Terrace Drive, Hamilton, L9A 2Z1 phone 385-1949 or Mr. J. Jansen v. Doorn, phone 575-0476	
200 acres, 190 acres cropable, suitable for beef and hogs. Open bottom land, bush, brick home, two silos. Extra 100 acres may be purchased.	Two, possibly three, bedroom duplex in Aldershot/Burlington area. Available Jan. 1, 1988. Call (416) 522-5000 or 689-7480.	Room for rent in basement apartment for Christian non-smoking female. Shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. Located in Hamilton, one block from McMaster University and bus routes. Cost \$40 weekly. Available immediately. Call (416) 527-1990.		
Teachers	Teachers	Wanted	Miscellaneous	Miscellaneous
MISSISSAUGA: The John Knox Christian School Society of Mississauga, Ont., is accepting applications for a qualified part-time teacher to work 15 hours per week in a combination of various primary levels (jr. K. through Gr. 2) starting immediately. A commitment to the Reformed world and life view is necessary. Please contact: Lorna Keith, Principal at (416) 822-8131 or Anne Veeneman, Education Committee, at (416) 844-6454.	WASAGA BEACH: Required immediately, teacher for Grade 7/8. Submit resume to Silvercrest Chr. School, R.R.#1, Wasaga Beach, ON L0L 2P0. Tel: (705) 429-4303, after 6 p.m.: (705) 322-3125.	Olds-Didsbury Fellowship Do you live in Olds, or Didsbury, Alberta, or area? Are you Reformed? (e.g. Christian Reformed) Are you interested in contact among Reformed believers in that area? Start a fellowship group perhaps? Then contact Pastor William (VanderBeek) at the CR Church of Red Deer, Alta., 16 McVicar St., T4N 5H3 or call 346-5659 (office) or 346-3961 (home). Church councils, inform us of members who live there?	REINDERS Architects, Consulting Engineers, Planners, Project Managers & Contractors Niagara-on-the-Lake, Brampton, Barrie, Iqaluit, Montreal, Halifax P.O. Box 278, Brampton, Ontario Canada L6V 2L1 (416) 457-1618	Reinders Group Ltd.
Teachers	WOODSTOCK: For the 1988/89 school year, we will be in need of a qualified, preferably experienced, special education teacher , with proven organizational skills. Some regular classroom teaching (presently 20%) may be involved. Strengths in French and/or music will be desirable assets. We offer pleasant working conditions in up-to-date modern facilities. Direct your resume or inquiries to the principal, John Knox Chr. School, 800 Juliana Dr., P.O. Box 243, Woodstock, ON N4S 7W8. Phone: (519) 539-1492.	Miscellaneous Evangelistic materials in Arabic. Also, a handbook in English, The Bible & Islam (\$1.95). Arabic Ministry, The Back to God Hour, P.O. Box 5070, Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8.	Roofing DYKSTRA BROS. R.R.#1, Beamsville, Ont. FREE ESTIMATES 563-7374 Marty 934-3600 Chuck	
AYLMER: Immanuel Chr. School seeks applications from teachers interested in a possible part-time position in the junior area beginning early in 1988. Please send resume to the school, 75 Caverly Rd., Aylmer, ON N5H 2P6 or for more information call: Andy Vander Ploeg, Principal at (519) 773-8476 (school) or (519) 773-5009 (home).	COBOURG: Northumberland Chr. School will need an experienced teacher for the primary grades , beginning in September 1988. Send application and a statement of philosophy to: Mr. Henry Lise, Principal, R.R.#5, Cobourg, ON K9A 4J8. Ph. 416-372-8766. Consider joining a culturally aware community in a "school with a difference" that is 'child-oriented, teacher-directed, Christ-centred and community-supported.'	Teachers	MacMASTER POOLMAN & DE VRIES BARRISTERS, SOLICITORS, NOTARIES 181 University Ave., Suite 2100, Toronto, ON M5H 3M7; 365-0258 Willem G. Poolman (Mr. in de Rechten, Leiden) Leonard de Vries, LL.B. <i>Also Dutch Law</i>	
Help Wanted	The Calvin Christian Elementary School in Chatham invites applications for the position of a PRINCIPAL Our school consists of about 210 students and 14 both full- and part-time teachers. We require a person who has biblical insight, sound Christian perspective and proven teaching ability, and who is able to give sensitive leadership to a dedicated staff and supportive community. <i>Please submit application and resume to:</i> Mr. M. VanLingen, Principal 72 Tissiman Ave., Chatham, ON N7M 4G5 School telephone: (519) 352-4980			
Help wanted on modern farrow to finish hog farm. Good wages and pleasant working conditions. House available. For further information phone Ron at (519) 529-7697.	Help wanted on dairy farm. Must have knowledge of cattle and general farm work. Reply with past experience to: Allard Colyn, R.R.#1, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0	Help Wanted DORDT COLLEGE invites applications for a position in the EDUCATION DEPARTMENT The position will include responsibility for course work in elementary education curriculum and instruction with an emphasis on reading and language arts. Candidates must have extensive classroom experience and graduate work beyond the masters degree. The doctorate is preferred. Academically qualified individuals who are committed to a Reformed biblical theology and educational philosophy are invited to send a personal resume, academic credentials, and personal references to: Dr. Douglas Ribbens Vice President for Academic Affairs Dordt College Sioux Center, Iowa 51250 Ethnic minorities and women are encouraged to apply. DORDT COLLEGE IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER	ICS BY CORRESPONDENCE 229 College Street Toronto, Ontario M5T 1R4 Telephone: (416) 979-2331 New Course on Christian Views of History Interested in history, and in thinking about how God's hand works in history? This new correspondence course may appeal to you. Much has been written about how Christians can interpret history with biblical eyes. Dr. C.T. McIntire is a leader in thinking about this subject, and in drawing together what Christians in different theological traditions are teaching. McIntire has set up this course based on readings from two books he has edited: "History and Historical Understanding" and "God, History and Historians." From this course you will learn what a view of history includes, what makes a view of history Christian, and how different emphases on what the Bible says about history lead to different Christian views of history. You will see the major themes and concerns of different views. If you want to think in more deeply Christian terms about the meaning of history, you should register for this course. You get the whole course, including the books, for only \$100. Please send me the course; my cheque is enclosed Please send me more information about "Christian Views of History" Name _____ Address _____ _____ mail code _____	

Weekly Crossword

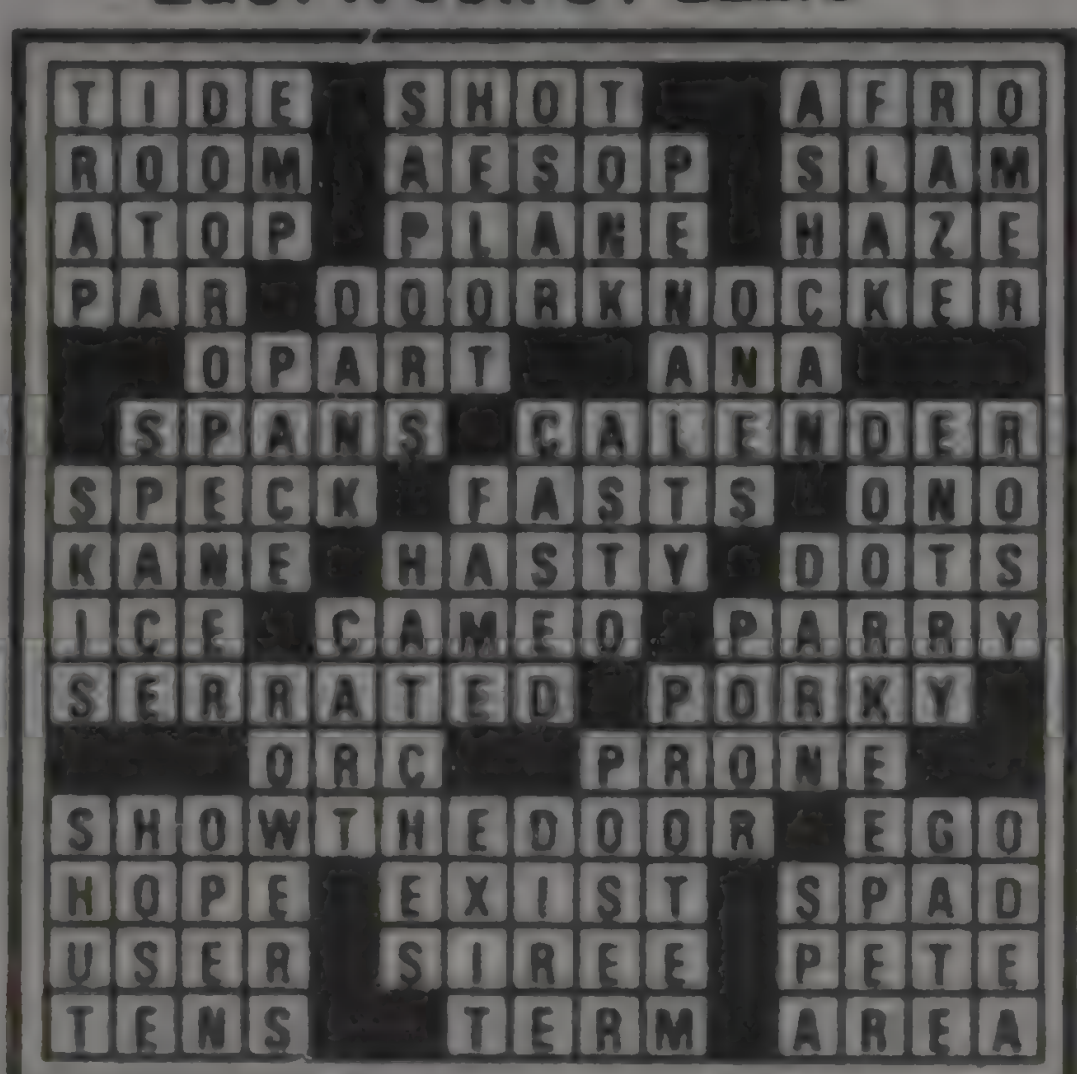
by I. Miller

- ACROSS**
- Layers
 - He's all talk, no action
 - Moby Dick's pursuer
 - Part of Earth
 - Conclude
 - Wonderful one
 - Nomad's urge
 - Bator
 - Subtle quality
 - Characteristic
 - Clean the slate
 - Charged particle
 - Ad's target
 - Dawdle
 - Rara —
 - Diamond rivals
 - Pindar product
 - Flange
 - Dinner course
 - Soak flax
 - Small bill
 - Narrow ridge
 - Yearn
 - Rouse
 - Pursuit of perfection
 - Mouths
 - Welsh
 - Soothing
 - Proverb
 - Lady's man
 - Wayfarer's film
 - President's office
 - Black and blue
 - Spiced stew
 - Corduroy feature
 - Bears young
 - Bambi for one
- DOWN**
- Goldie of film
 - Jacob's brother
 - 1492 vessel
 - Sorrow
 - Funny person
 - wet (wrong)
 - Person addressed
 - Being
 - One who sells to public
 - Reunion men
 - Pantomime dance
 - Having wings
 - Nonsense
 - Tan
 - Place for 1A
 - Touch or taste
 - Controversial
 - Chocolate substitute
 - Like ewe
 - Fr. city
 - Shinto temple gateway
 - Idyllic places
 - Juniper
 - Indigent
 - Milk mart
 - In an aimless manner
 - Construction material
 - Walk like a small child
 - Fixes firmly
 - Chemical compound
 - To a place beneath
 - Variable star
 - Spoken
 - Penn. port
 - Make eyes at
 - Straightedge
 - Salutation word
 - A Gardner
 - Wine: Fr.



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Last Week's Puzzle

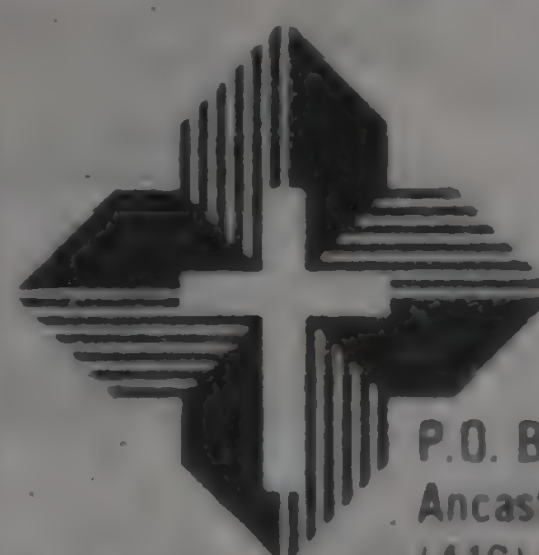


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Place your brief announcement FREE in our calendar! All announcements subject to manager's approval. Please note deadlines below.

Calendar of Events

- Dec. 3-12** Under the direction of John Bell, MMus, the 67-voice Ontario Bible College Christmas choir will perform a series of concerts:
Dec. 3: Evening School concert in the OBC chapel, 8 p.m.;
Dec. 4: Yorkminster Park Baptist Church, Toronto, 8 p.m.;
Dec. 5: Benton St. Baptist Church, Kitchener, 8 p.m. The choir will be assisted by pianist Sharon Sinclair, organist Sharon Bell, MFA and a 12-piece band under the direction of Paul Fehderau, BMus.
- Dec. 5** Organ concert and hymn sing with organist Andre Knevel, at 8 p.m. in Calvin CRC, Hwy. 5, Dundas, Ont.
- Dec. 5** Annual giant bazaar and auction at Knox Christian School, Scugog Rd., Bowmanville, Ont. Everyone welcome.
- Dec. 5** Handel's "Messiah" presented by "Laude Dominum Choir" with organist Dick De Jonge at 8 p.m. in St. Andrew's United Church, Chatham, Ont.
- Dec. 9** Special organ recital by John W. Vandertuin at 8 p.m. in the concert hall of W. Ross MacDonald School, Brantford, Ont.
- Dec. 11** Christmas concert by band "Holland's Glory" with Andre Knevel at the organ at 8 p.m. in Covenant CRC, St. Catharines, Ont. Free will offering. Refreshments. Bring a friend!
- Dec. 11** Organ and trumpet concert at 8 p.m. in Clarkson CRC, Mississauga, Ont., featuring organist Jan Overduin of Sir Wilfred Laurier's Faculty of Music, and trumpet virtuoso Eric Schultz of The University of Western Ontario. Tickets \$8.00 adults, \$4.00 seniors/students. For reservations call (416) 227-9112 or 823-2956.
- Dec. 11 & 12** Handel's "Messiah" will be performed by the Listowel Concert Singers and the London Sinfonia Orchestra. Both evenings at 8 p.m. in the Trinity United Church, Listowel, Ont. Tickets \$10. For info. call (519) 291-3106.
- Dec. 11-12** Healing Seminar at Community CRC of Meadowvale, 2630 Inlake Ct., Mississauga, Ont. Led by Mike Turrigiano from Vineyard Chr. Fellowship, New York City. For info. call (416) 826-5722.
- Dec. 12** A Christmas organ and choir concert with special guest organist Andre Knevel in Dundas Street Centre United Church, 482 Dundas St., London, Ont., at 7:30 p.m.
- Dec. 12** Handel's "Messiah" presented by Chatham's "Laude Dominum Choir" at 8 p.m. at Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ont. Proceeds for Redeemer's organ fund.
- Dec. 12** Join the Mountainview Singers in celebrating Christmas 8 p.m., Mountainview CRC, Grimsby. Sing all your favourite Christmas carols. The choir will perform Dale Grootenhuus' Christmas cantata "Glad Tidings." Solo sung by Mr. Harold de Haan. Free will offering.
- Dec. 19** Christmas concert at 8 p.m. in Trinity United Church (Church & Division), Bowmanville, Ont., by Leendert Kooij's O.C.M.A. with Andre Knevel at the organ.
- Dec. 20** Combined Christmas concert by the Brampton Chr. Choral Society "Praise the Lord" (Wm. Hoekstra director) and the Chr. Male Choir "The Choraliers" (Gerry Numan director) at 8 p.m. in the Second CRC, Brampton, Ont.
- Dec. 20** St. Thomas & District Male Choir and the St. Thomas Ladies Choir will have a combined Christmas concert in the 1st United Church, St. George St., St. Thomas, at 8 p.m.
- Dec. 20** Christmas celebration with Adoramus-Maranatha Choir, at 7:30 p.m. in the CRC, York, Ont.
- Dec. 23** Christmas celebration with Adoramus-Maranatha Choir at 8 p.m. in Mount Hamilton CRC, Hamilton, Ont.
- Dec. 23** Christmas concert at 8 p.m. in the Willowdale United Church (Kenneth Ave.), Willowdale, Ont., by Leendert Kooij's O.C.M.A. with Andre Knevel at the organ.
- Dec. 27** Annual sacred concert at 8 p.m. in St. Catharines (place to be announced). With organist Christiaan Teeuwssen and "The Ambassadors."
- Jan. 13-Feb. 10** Extension Series 1988: "A Planet for the Taking" presented by The King's College, at the Calgary Chr. School at 7:30 p.m. on Jan. 13, 27; Feb. 3 and 10.
- Jan. 14-17** Couples treat at Fair Havens Conference Centre, Beaverton, Ont. For info. call (705) 426-7378.
- Jan. 20** Youth in concert: Edmonton Youth Orchestra, The King's College Choir and U of A Concert Choir, directed by Michael Massey, at 8 p.m. at St. Joseph's Basilica, Edmonton, Alta.
- Jan. 21-Feb. 11** Extension Series 1988: "A Planet for the taking" presented by The King's College, at the college, Edmonton, at 8 p.m. on Jan. 21, 28, Feb. 4 and 11.
- Jan. 28-Mar. 3** Dobson film series "Turn Your Heart Towards Home" in the East Strathroy CRC at 8 p.m. on Jan. 28, Feb. 4, 11, 18, 25 and Mar. 3.
- Feb. 3-12** Series of presentations by Professor Dale Grootenhuus on the new Psalter Hymnal: Feb. 3: First CRC, Sarnia, Ont.; Feb. 4: First CRC, London, Ont.; Feb. 5: First CRC, Drayton, Ont.; Feb. 6: Auditorium, Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ont.; Feb. 7: Trinity CRC, St. Catharines, Ont.; Feb. 8: Mountainview CRC, Grimsby, Ont.; Feb. 9: Rehoboth CRC, Bowmanville, Ont.; Feb. 10: Grace CRC, Agincourt, Ont.; Feb. 11: First CRC, Barrie, Ont.; Feb. 12: Second CRC, Brampton, Ont. Time: 8 p.m.
- Feb. 12-14** Family retreat at Fair Havens Conference Centre, Beaverton, Ont. For info. call (705) 426-7378.
- Feb. 22-23** RCBPA's fourth annual convention at Holiday Inn, Burlington, Ont. For info. call (416) 524-1203.
- Feb. 13** Dedication of the famous REIL tracker-action pipe organ in the auditorium of Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ont. The two-manual, 2000-pipe organ from Heerde, The Netherlands, will be played by virtuoso organist Christiaan Teeuwssen, Redeemer's new Assistant Professor of Music. Starts at 7:30 p.m.

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*Those wishing to take courses for credit must have a four-year B.A. degree. Auditors need only obtain the permission of the instructor. Courses may be taken as part of ICS's one-year Master's program.

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Dated	Mailed	Two column ad deadline	Classified deadline
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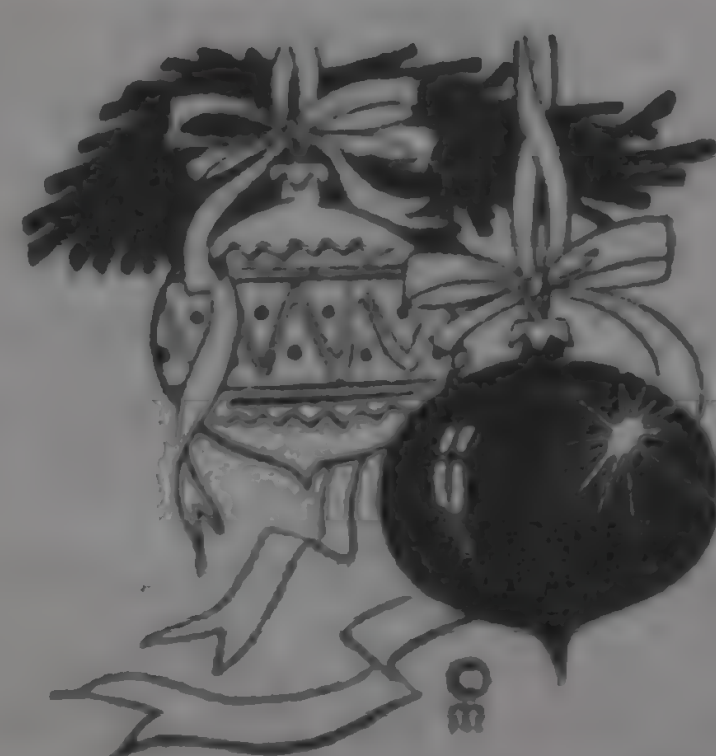
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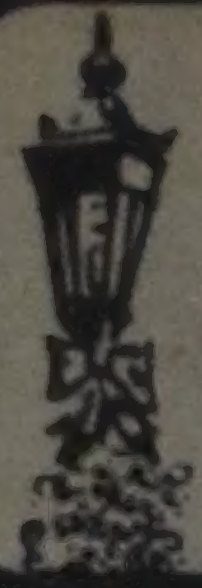
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De donkere dagen van Maggie MacManus Arie Dof

Zo nu en dan — niet al te vaak, gelukkig — belt mijn vroegere baas mij op met het verzoek, om het een of andere klein timmerkarweitje te verrichten, tegen behoorlijke vergoeding natuurlijk.

Een week voor Kerstfeest had hij een klusje voor mij, dat ongeveer drie dagen zou duren. De baas biechtte eerlijk op, dat niemand van zijn personeel er veel voor voelde, om het grote huis van Maggie MacManus te betreden. Ze kenden haar en vreesden haar. Maar op mijn vergvorderde leeftijd en met mijn bekende tact en wijsheid zou ik er wel niet tegenop zien, om een paar dagen bij Mrs. MacManus te timmeren.

Tegen zoveel vleierij kon ik niet op en ik aanvaardde de uitdaging. Ik beloofde Katrien, dat ik het te verdienen geld zou gebruiken voor de aankoop van een micro-oven, voorwaar een schoon en nobel kerkstgeschenk.

De volgende dag reed ik naar het huis van Mrs. MacManus. Nieuwsgierig, maar ook een tikkeltje zenuwachtig, beklom ik de trappen van het grote huis. Ik belde aan. Hol en ijzig klonk het geluid van de bel. Niemand deed open. Ik wachtte een paar minuten en begon koude voeten te krijgen. Weer belde ik, nu wat meer aanhoudend. Dit hielp. Achter de deur hoorde ik het geluid van een wandelstok, die regelmatig op een vloer tikte.

Het geluid kwam dichterbij en nog tamelijk plotseling werd de voordeur wijd opengegooid, zodat ik bijna naar binnen rolde. Mijn schrik verdubbelde, toen ik naar de persoon voor me keek: een opvallende zware, oude vrouw, met haar hele aanzienlijke gewicht op een stok leunend. Haar leeftijd viel niet te schatten, want haar gelaatstrekken gingen schuil achter een dik masker van make-up. Ze had hoog opgemaakt blauw geverfd haar, grote, stekende ogen, een lange scherpe neus en misprijzende lippen. Ze was voorwaar geen "Miss Canada!"

Voordat ik kon zeggen wie ik was en waar ik voor kwam, begon de dame me heel ondames-achtig uit te schelden, omdat ik twee keer had gebeld, en net gedaan had alsof er brand was, en geen rekening had gehouden met de trage bewegingen van een oude, afgeleefde vrouw.

Door een lange gang volgde ik Mrs. Maggie MacManus naar de keuken, die er oud, maar netjes uitzag. In de hoek naast de koelkast wilde ze een paar kastjes hebben, en of ik die er maar gauw even wilde inzetten, als ik tenminste het vak van timmeren verstond en de kantjes er niet afliep, zoals de meeste kerels tegenwoordig.

Ik glimlachte innemend naar de verbitterde tante, en voor een ogenblik zweeg ze.

Even later beval ze me, haar leuningstoel met voetenbank uit de woonkamer te halen en middenin de keuken te plaatsen. Als een vorstin ging ze zitten, strekte haar stramme benen en uitte eindelijk eens iets normaals. "Hè, hè," zei ze.

Intussen zat ze me aardig in de weg, en nadat ik al een paar keer tot haar grote verontwaardiging met een plank tegen haar stoel had gestoten, vroeg ik beleefd, of ze niet een beetje opzij wilde gaan. "Nee," antwoordde ze resoluut.

De leuningstoel bleek Mrs. Maggie's praatstoel te zijn. Ze begon te klagen over de oude dag en stelde mij de gevaarlijke vraag, hoe oud ik haar schatte. Om alle conflicten te vermijden, zei ik: "Vijf-en-zestig,"

waarop ze begon te hinniken als een paard en met zekere trots meedeelde, dat ik er één-en-twintig jaar bij moest doen: in oktober was ze zes-en-tachtig geworden! Ze voegde er aan toe, dat ze ondanks haar suikerziekte en hartkwaal nog een scherpe geest had, en dat niemand haar om de tuin kon leiden, zelfs haar twee neven niet, die op haar erfenis loerden. Ze verwachtte zeker honderd jaar te zullen worden.

En zo teutte Maggie MacManus de hele dag door. Haar woorden waren doorregen met verdachtmakingen en wantrouwen, bitterheid en sarcasme. Vrienden scheen ze niet te hebben. Ze moest wel dood-eenzaam zijn. Haar hele levensgeschiedenis kreeg ik te horen, en met boosaardig welbehagen wijdde ze uit over intieme details van haar onstuimige huwelijksleven. Zo nu en dan moest ik er van blozen.

Zo kwam ik te weten, dat ze zes keer getrouwd was geweest: twee keer was ze weduwe geweest en vier keer was ze gescheiden. Van de meeste van haar echtgenoten kon ze zich niet veel meer herinneren, behalve dat ze vreselijk dronken en hun vertier buitenshuis zochten en altijd op haar centen loerden, maar haar eerste man, die twintig jaar ouder was geweest dan zij en als een vader voor haar was geweest, die kon ze nooit vergeten.

Die eerste echtgenoot had aanvankelijk zendeling willen worden, niet omdat hij zo godsdienstig was, maar omdat de oerwouden van Afrika en de wilde dieren hem zo aantrokken. Toen hij door twee erfenissen een rijk man was geworden, ging hij op eigen

kosten jaarlijks naar Afrika, en dit was zijn dood geworden. Op de laatste dag van zijn leven had hij zich verdekt opgesteld in een boom, omdat een tijger in aantocht was. Eén van zijn mede-jagers had hem aangezien voor een mensaap en hem uit de boom geschoten. Dit was een vergissing geweest, maar eveneens een voltreffer.

Zo kwebbelde Maggie maar door. Het scheen haar goed te doen, dat ik er was en dat ze haar bittere verhalen aan mij kwijt kon. Ik merkte dat het haar speet, toen ik om vijf uur huiswaarts ging. Ze schold me uit voor een luie kerel, die bang was voor een beetje overwerk.

De volgende dag scheen een herhaling te zullen worden van de eerste. Toen Maggie me zag, groette ze me nauwelijks, maar keek me misprijzend aan, scheldend op de donkere dagen voor Kerstfeest, alsof het mijn schuld was. Al mokkend begon ze wat te eten in de keuken.

Heel opgewekt maakte ik de opmerking, dat het nog maar drie dagen voor Kerstfeest was. Dit was voor Maggie de aanleiding, om tegen het Kerstfeest te protesteren. Volgens haar was Kerst uitgevonden door hebzuchtige zakenlieden, net als Moederdag. En de kerken deden er rustig aan mee en hielden de mensen zoet met hun romantische en sentimentele smoesjes over een baby in een kribbe, die zogenaamd Gods zoon was en het product van Gods liefde.

"Bah," riep ze uit. Ze had in haar lange en zure leven wel wat anders meegemaakt dan de liefde van God. Haar eerste lieve man verongelukt — als het tenminste geen moord was geweest —, en haar enige kind in de wereldoorlog gesneuveld in Frankrijk.

En verder al die huwelijksdrama's met zelfzuchtige en ontrouwe echtgenoten! En al dat alleen zijn! Wist Arie Dof wel, wat dat was: helemaal alleen zijn? Nee, daar had zo'n vrome Hollander natuurlijk geen weet van. Die heeft een lieve vrouw en een heleboel kinderen en veel vrienden; die vindt het vanzelfsprekend, dat er een God is, die je liefheeft...

Ze snoof hatelijk en zweeg. Ik wist ook niet zo gauw, wat ik moest zeggen. Ieder die Maggie MacManus kende, was bang voor haar en mijdde haar, maar waarschijnlijk kende niemand de nood van haar onverwerkt verdriet. Ieder raadde achter de zware make-up de rimpels van de ouderdom, maar niemand dacht er aan, dat het de diepe groeven van ellende waren. Arme ziel! Zo moet het medelijden in mijn ogen gelezen hebben, want plotseling smeed ze haar stok op de grond en snauwde me toe, dat ik beter aan mijn werk kon gaan dan hier te zitten niks-doen in de baas zijn tijd...

Ik heb me omgedraaid naar mijn keukenkastjes, die bijna klaar waren, en onder het werken door heb ik Maggie verteld over een goede kennis, die ook maar één zoon had en die jongen op een vreselijke manier had zien sterven.

"Die zal ook wel geen hoge dunk hebben gehad van Gods liefde," smaalde Maggie. "Het was God zelf."

Mrs. MacManus gromde wat en snoof. "Man," zei ze hatelijk, "je had dominee moeten worden of advocaat van Gods vuile zaakjes."

De rest van de morgen was ze merkwaardig stil. Toen ze 's middags na haar slaapje weer de keuken binnentikte, liet ze me een Bijbel zien met vergulde sloten. "Kijk," kraakte ze

Vervolg op pagina 38...





O, Kindeke klein ... Herman de Jong

Elsa en Jan wonen in een groepstehuis voor geestelijk gestoorde. Zo'n dertig jaar geleden begon men er mee, ondanks protesten van "normale" mensen. Men zag de prijzen van huizen rondom de groepstehuizen al kelderen. Men zag jonge kinderen gemolesteerd. Men vreesde lawaai in de straat. Maar men vreesde het meest, dat men herinnerd zou worden aan iets pijnlijks.

Elsa en Jan kunnen lezen en schrijven, ofschoon het eerste beter dan het laatste. Vroeger zouden ze wezenloos in een hoekje van een inrichtingszaal gezeten hebben. Ze zijn zo zelfstandig nu, dat ze koster en kosteres van een kerk werden. Soms hebben ze nog een beetje hulp nodig. Maar dat heeft de jonge dominee er graag voor over. Hij voelt zich thuis bij de vrienden. Zelf heeft de dominee een broertje dat Down's Syndrome heeft. Mensen die zich zo betrokken weten bij het leed (ja, dat is het toch ook hoor!) der geestelijk-gestoorde, sloven zich voor hen uit.

★ ★ ★ ★

"Voeten vegen hoor dominee, je maakt er altijd zo'n troep van hè?" Zo begroet kosteres Elsa elke morgen haar dominee. "Ik heb de koffie zo klaar hoor, ga eerst de post maar es doorkijken." De jonge dominee glimlacht. Leuk als je leven zo bestuurd wordt door een vrouw thuis en een vrouw in de kerk. Want een vrouw is Elsa. Negen-en-twintig is ze. Tenger. Een mooi gezichtje waarin alleen de ogen soms vreemd dwalen. En een zenuwtrek doet haar linkeroog wat knippen.

"Is Jan niet meegekomen?" vraagt de dominee terwijl hij zijn kerkpantoffels aantrekt. "Foei nou toch, dominee, bent u nu helemaal vergeten dat Jan gisteren een toeval had? Dan moet hij toch uitslapen, dat weet u toch wel ... gekke mannen hoor, vergeten alles!" Speels slaat ze de jonge dominee op zijn tengere schouder. Hij doet alsof hij in elkaar krimpt van de pijn, en Elsa lacht, lacht zich de tranen in de ogen. De dominee denkt: "Als mijn vrouw nu zo lachte, zou ik dat overdreven vinden ... maar bij Elsa vind ik het heel gewoon.

"Ja maar, de kerstboom ligt achter de kerk te bevriezen," zegt hij. "Doen we samen wel even," zegt Elsa kordaat, "tien minuten bij uw preek weg, dat mag hem ook niet hinderen hè, en anders preekt u zondag maar wat korter."

Elsa was eerst alleen kosteres. Maar het zware werk kon ze toch niet af. Ze had zelf voorgesteld dat Jan haar zou helpen. O, Jan is zo sterk! Maar Jan leed aan toevallen. Iemand moest altijd op hem letten, ondanks de pilletjes die hij er voor kreeg. Elsa had tegen de verpleegster, die wekelijks het huis bezocht, gezegd: "Kan ik best hoor, geeft u mij de pilletjes en het rubberstaafje maar. Steek ik in mijn schortzak."

En zo verdeelden Elsa en Jan hun kosters-taak. Jan wrijft de banken. Stofzuigen kan hij niet, want daar moet je beide handen voor gebruiken en Jan heeft niet veel kracht in zijn linkerarm. Zijn vingers staan wat naar binnen. Maar zijn andere arm ... ho maar! Soms is de dominee bang dat over tien jaar alle banken weggewreven zijn.

De koffie is klaar. Elsa zit in de studeerkamer. Fijn is dat hoor ... beter dan in de mandenfabriek werken ... krijg je pas koffie om half-elf. Dominee bidt voor een goede dag en ook voor Jan. Elsa denkt: Als Jan er nu was, zou hij niet eens meebidden, die rare jongen. "Ik geloof niet in de kerk," zegt Jan, "kijk liever naar teevee." 'n Rotzooi hoor in de kerk, allemaal vrouwen." Jan houdt niet van vrouwen.

De dominee weet daar meer van. Jan komt uit een gezin waar de vader wegliep en de moeder het kleine, langzame jongetje zo veelvuldig mishandelde dat hij van haar weggenomen werd.

Het eerste jaar samen in de kerk was niet gemakkelijk. Jan snauwde, bromde en gromde. Als ze hem goedmoedig plaagde werd hij spinnijdig. Dat deed ze nu niet meer. Maar langzamerhand verdween Jans vrees voor het vrouwelijk geslacht. Elsa werd zijn vriendin. Samen gingen ze naar de dominee en trots verkondigde Jan, "Elsa en ik zijn vrienden. Jij bent mijn vriend en Elsa is mijn vriendin." Tot Elsa's grote verbazing voegde hij er aan toe: "Nu moet ik dus wel naar die ellendige club."

Een heel jaar ging hij nu al, maar hij zong niet mee, niks hoor! Ook deugde er niets van de Bijbelverhalen. Volgens

Jan kon er eenvoudig geen water uit een rots komen als je er met een stok op sloeg. Hokus-pokus, noemde Jan het! En Jezus? "De dominee kan ik zien, en omdat ik hem zien kan, is hij mijn vriend geworden. Jij bent mijn vriendin, want ik moet elke dag naar jouw gekakel luisteren. Iemand die ik niet kan zien of horen, hoe kan zo iemand mijn vriend zijn?"

Elsa wist daarop geen antwoord. Ze begreep er zelf ook niet alles van, hoor! Ze wist enkel dat als ze onder het stofzuigen aan Jezus dacht, ze heel blij werd. Dan ging ze zingen. Dan keek ze vergenoegd rond, want de kerk, nou ja, de kerk is een beetje hemel

"Dominee?" "Ja, Elsa?" "Ga je je preek schrijven?" "Morgen zal ik mijn preek schrijven, Elsa." "Is preken maken moeilijk, dominee?" "Nee, hoor, het is fijn om over Jezus te vertellen." "Maar wat u zondagmorgen gaat zeggen, daar begrijp ik niet veel van." "Er zijn meer mensen die dat zeggen, Elsa. Je moet natuurlijk heel goed luisteren." "Doe ik ook hoor, maar soms ga ik de koorleden tellen." "Mag gerust hoor, dat zijn lieve mensen."

"Dominee?" "Ja, Elsa?" Hij ziet haar pupillen vlug draaien en de zenuwtrek wisselt zich van linker naar rechter wang. Hij dacht al dat ze ergens mee zat! "Ik ga trouwen, dominee." De bureaustoel waarin de eerwaarde met de handen in de nek zit te wippen, wordt zo nerveus dat de boekenplank achter de stoel goed te pas komt. Dan schiet de dominee met een schok vooruit en legt beide armen op het versleten groen van het bureau. "Weet Jan daarvan, Elsa?" De vraag verwacht haar nog meer. Ze kan dominee's vlugge gedachtengang niet volgen. Even is het stil. Dan: "Hoe weet dominee dat nou?"

De jonge dominee mag graag het orgel in de kerk bespelen. Op het orgel staat een spiegeltje. Zo kan hij zijn koster en kosteres soms observeren. Hij heeft al lang gemerkt, dat Jan niet altijd banken wrijft. Soms staat hij stil als een standbeeld en volgen zijn ogen de bewegelijke Elsa. Ogen die diep in hun kassen liggen en soms het wit laten zien als een vreemde tot hem spreekt. Maar Elsa is geen vreemde. Als Jan zo naar Elsa kijkt, komt er een stille lach op dat hoekige gezicht ... een stille, in-lieve lach!

"Ja maar, het is Jan waarmee ik wil

trouwen," zegt Elsa nu wat rustiger. "Maar hij is soms zo boos op me. Hij wil niet dat ik steeds over Jezus praat. En toch komt hij nu al zo lang naar de Bijbelclub. Hij is, nou, ja ... nou, ja, ongeschillig! Maar ik ..." Haar stem hapert. "Jij houdt van hem, he," zegt de dominee zacht. "En ik denk dat hij ook van jou houdt."

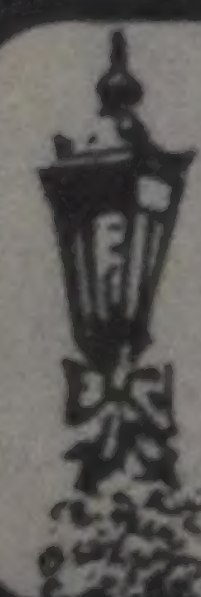
Er groeit iets zo wonderfijns in die meisjesogen, dat ach ... de dominee is ook maar een tenger, fijngevoelig mannetje ... verder praten gaat hem slecht af! Luisteren dan maar. "Maar ik kan niet met hem trouwen, zegt u nu zelf, als Jan Jezus niet lief heeft. Je kunt niet in de kerk trouwen als je niet van Jezus bent. Kan toch niet, dominee?" Nu heeft Elsa tijd nodig om haar gedachten te rangschikken. Het wordt zo ingewikkeld ... foei! Vlug staat ze op. Even later hoort de dominee haar schallen boven het grommen van de grote stofzuiger

Het middenpad moet nog. Even rusten in de bank. Oh, wat houdt ze van de kerk. In de ramen staat Jezus. Hij is de goede schaapherder. Zij is één van zijn schaapjes, dat weet ze best! Jezus gaat een klein schaapje zoeken. Dat is Jan ... maar Jan is niet klein. Misschien kan Jezus hem daarom niet vinden. Ze tast naar het rubber staafje in haar schortzak. Gelukkig, het is er nog. Stel je voor dat ze het verloor!

't Was niet zo erg gisteren. Ze ziet het altijd aankomen. Hij gaat in een bank zitten en steeds vlugger gaat zijn bovenlichaam heen en weer. Oh, Oh, steunt hij dan. Soms bonkt zijn hoofd haast op de rugleuning van de andere bank.

Ze legde hem in het middenpad op het rode tapijt. Toen het gebeurd was lag zijn inwit gezicht in haar schoot ... net een kindje. Ik kan geen kindje krijgen ... kan niet! De blauwe kleur is al weggetrokken. Zoals altijd streelt ze z'n haar. Vroeger bromde hij als hij bijkwam: "Blijf van mijn haar af." Nu vindt hij het wel leuk, denkt ze. Wat een knappe jongen. Haar jongen.

Oh, oh, nu wordt Elsa's gezicht haast nog roder dan in de studeerkamer. Want ze had de dominee niet alles verteld. Nee hoor, stel je voor! Zomaar ineens had ze Jan een kusje gegeven op zijn voorhoofd, en nog één ... en nog één! Hij sliep toch nog, dus hij merkte er niets van. Ze had ineens zo'n raar gevoel gekregen. Een beetje alsof het niet



De donkere dagen van Maggie MacManus (Laatste gedeelte)

... vervolg van pagina 37.

triomfantelijk, "zo hard heb ik die Kerst-God van je nodig." Ze wees naar de roestige sloten en schreef haar naam in de dikke laag stof op de omslag. "Als je die kastjes netjes aflevert, mag jij die Bijbel hebben. Je kunt er beter mee overweg dan ik. Beschouw hem maar als een kerstgeschenk, het eerste kerstcadeautje dat Maggie MacManus geeft sinds veertig jaar."

Later in de middag heb ik het stof eraf geveegd en het roest wat weggekrabd. De Bijbel was een fraai exemplaar met prachtige, gekleurde platen.

"Kijk," zei ik tegen oude Maggie, "hier heb je het, waar ik je straks van

vertelde." Ik wees haar Johannes 3:16 aan. En zowaar, ze ging er op in! Ze pakte tenminste de Bijbel beet, zette haar bril op de punt van haar lange neus, en las: "Alzo lief heeft God de wereld gehad"

"Alzo lief heeft God Maggie MacManus gehad," waagde ik. "Nonsens!" knalde Maggie en sloeg het Boek dicht.

Om vijf uur vertrok ik weer. Ik beloofde, dat ik morgenochtend zou terugkomen om de kastjes af te werken. Maggie mopperde me na, dat het ook tijd werd

Dat is het laatste, wat ik Maggie heb horen zeggen, want de volgende morgen

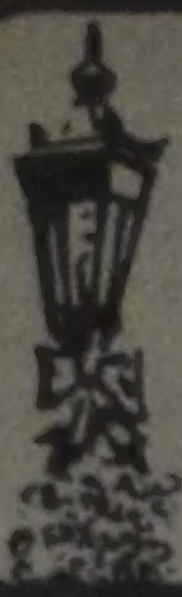
was ze dood. Om acht uur stapte ik haar huis binnen — ze had me een sleutel toevertrouwd — en toen ik een uur later nog steeds het getik van haar stok niet hoorde, werd ik wat ongerust. Ik begon te roepen in de grote, holle gang, maar er kwam geen antwoord. Toen ben ik naar boven gegaan. De derde deur, die ik opende, gaf toegang tot haar slaapkamer. Ze lag in bed, onwezenlijk stil, onbeschrijfelijk oud, nauwelijks herkenbaar, want er was geen make-up. Ik zag het meteen. Ze leefde niet meer. Een oud, afgeleefd gezicht vol rimpels en vlekken. Maar de harde trek was eruit.

Haar stok lag op de grond naast het

bed, en wat weggeleden, schuin tegen haar aan, lag de Bijbel van gisteren open bij Johannes 3. Toen moest ik wel even mijn neus snuiten en een traan wegvegen. Ik heb de ziekenauto gebeld en de laatste hand gelegd aan de keukenkastjes. De Bijbel heb ik ingepakt en meegenomen, mijn kerstgeschenk van Maggie MacManus. Het is nu waar, wat ze gisteren zei, dat ik hem beter kan gebruiken dan zij.

Wie weet, zijn Maggie's donkere dagen voorbij en viert ze nu Kerstfeest.

Arie Dof woont ergens in Canada. Waar precies weet niemand.



O, Kindeke klein ... (Laatste gedeelte)

mocht wat ze deed. Maar ook een beetje ... ach het was zo raar. Ze begreep er niets van.

Toen gingen Jans ogen langzaam open en het wazige velletje over zijn ogen trok weg. Toen ging heel langzaam zijn goede arm omhoog, en hij trok haar gezicht naar beneden en hij zoende haar op de neus en toen zei hij zo zachtjes dat ze het bijna niet kon horen: "Ga je nooit weg Elsa, ga je nooit weg?" en toen dacht ze; nee lieverd, ik ga nooit weg want ik heb je zo lief en ze trok hem overeind en een hele poos zaten ze stil in het middenpad en ze legde zijn slechte arm om haar schouder maar hij zei niets meer maar ze voelde dat hij het fijn vond, nou en of, en de hele nacht was ze wakker en dacht: we gaan trouwen, we gaan trouwen, fijn samen in een flatje kan toch best. Maar Jezus hè, Jan moest Jezus lief hebben, want ze wilde in de kerk trouwen net als andere mensen, in een mooie lange jurk met een sluier en een kapje.

Ach wat jammer, misschien kon Jan Jezus nooit liefhebben ... Kom aan meid ... het hele middenpad moet nog ... morgen moet het schoon zijn voor de kerstviering van de Bijbelclub in de kerk. Er zouden wel weer een heleboel mensen komen. 't Zaalte beneden was vast niet groot genoeg!

De Kerstavond. Nu gaan alle lampen uit en alleen de kaarsen branden. Boven in de kerk, net boven het kribje, hangt Jans zaklantaarn. Dat is de ster. Als 't ie nou maar niet naar beneden klettert, denkt Jan. Elsa zit naast Jan. Haar hand kruipt tegen zijn mooie geruite jasje. Hij is zo'n keurige meneer! Nou!

De hoofdleidster vertelt het bekende verhaal. Buiten de kegel van de ster, in het schemer-donker, staan de herders en de engelen en de wijzen uit het Oosten. Jan kijkt naar Elsa. Elsa is Maria. Haar blauwe hoofddoek glanst een beetje in het kaarslicht. Natuurlijk is hij blijven zitten. Hij zal wel oppassen om zo'n gekke mantel te dragen. Elsa is de moeder van Jezus. Die heet Maria. Hoe kan dat nou ... straks krijgen ze doughnuts en koffie en kerstgebak ... daar verheugt hij zich op.

Soms neemt Elsa doughnuts mee als ze overdag aan het werk zijn. Kijk nu toch es, wat is ze mooi ... zijn Elsa! Dan komt er een gevoel van onrust in hem op. Altijd die vrouwen ... nooit laten ze hem met rust. De verpleegster, de directrice, de vrouw van de dominee, Elsa. Maar met Elsa is het anders. Och kom, gek ben je, Jan ...

Hoe werkt de Geest van God? Wat gebeurt er ineens in de ziel van Jan? Waarom gaat hij nu toch ineens luisteren naar het verhaal? Strak staren zijn diepliggende ogen naar de hoofdleidster, die blij is dat nu ook die grote vent luistert. Ze kijkt naar hem en ziet zijn grote bovenlichaam langzaam naar voren buigen, alsof hij nog dichterbij het verhaal wil zijn. Maar owee ... nu begint hij steeds vlugger heen en weer te bewegen. Dat gaat niet goed. Gelukkig dat Elsa er is. Die weet hoe ze met hem om moet gaan Kijk dan, Elsa heeft het al gemerkt.

Terwijl Elsa rustig door de lichtkegel naar haar zitplaats loopt, springt Jan op. Hij struikelt haast over het kribje. De hoofdleidster, die bijna klaar is met haar Kerstverhaal, houdt op met vertellen. Wat gaat die jongen nu doen?

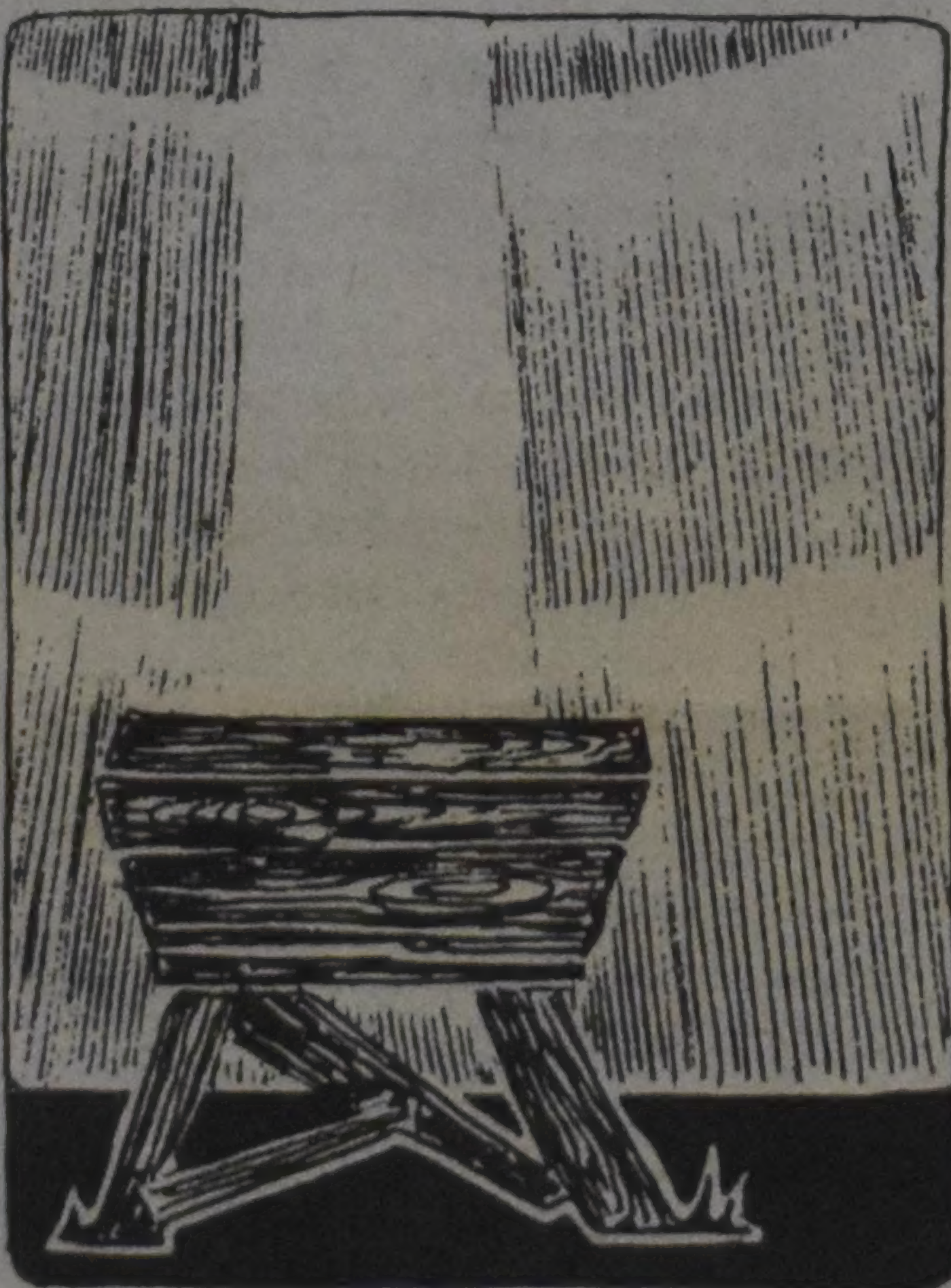
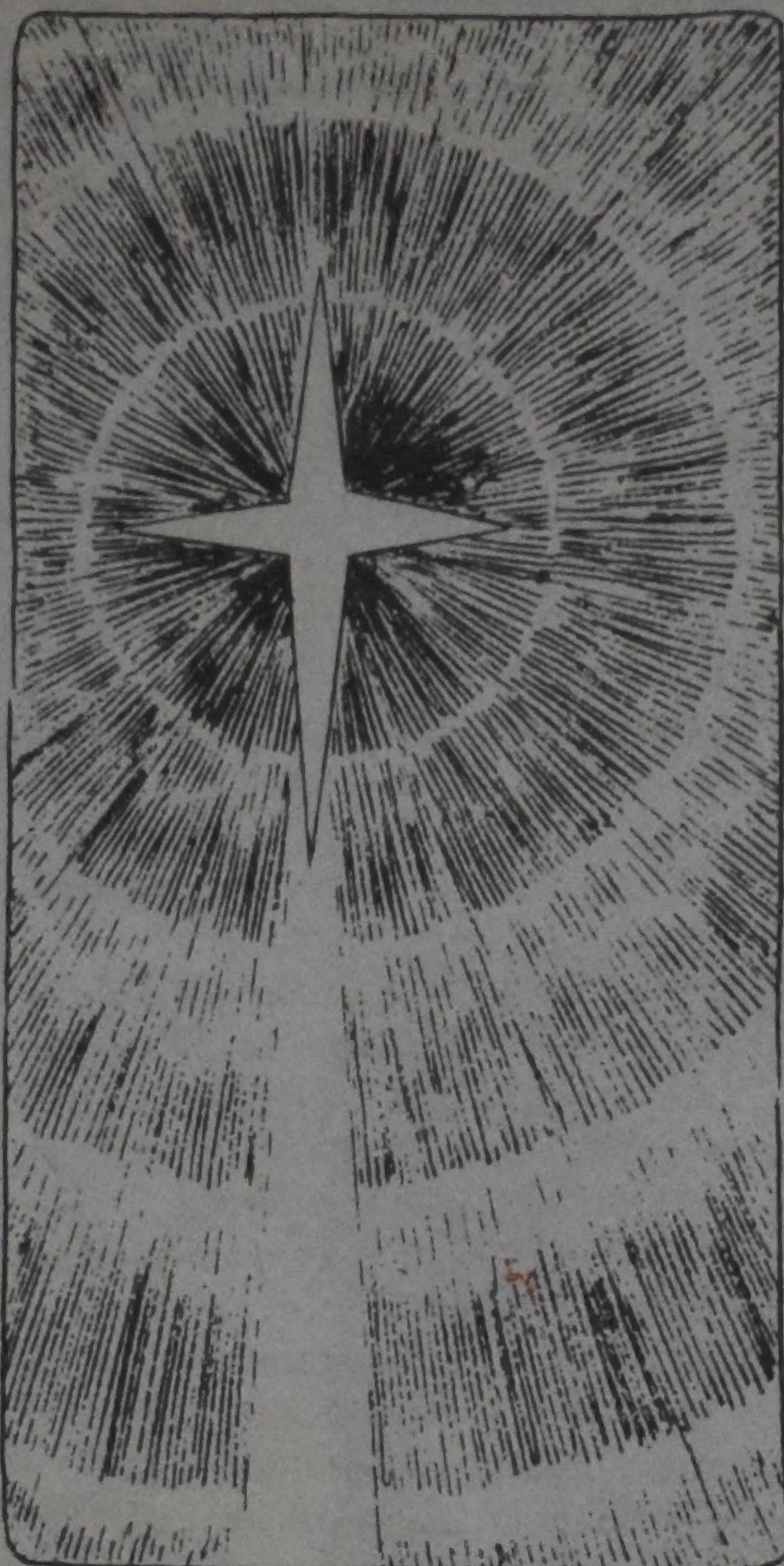


Illustration by John Knight

Hij neemt Elsa's hand. Samen lopen ze naar het platform waar de hoofdleidster staat. "Ja, Jan?" vraagt ze bedaad. Het gebeurt wel meer dat in hun enthousiasme de vrienden ongevraagd het verhaal onderbreken.

Jan fluistert: "Kan ik een lied zingen?" "Natuurlijk, ga je gang, ik vertel straks wel verder." Elsa kruipt in elkaar. Ze slaat de handen voor de ogen en de blauwe doek glijdt van haar hoofd. Ze wil tegen haar Jan op kunnen zien en nu gaat hij zich dwaas aanstellen. Zingen kan hij immers niet ... ze heeft hem nog nooit horen zingen ... en hij kent de versjes niet eens! Maar luister dan Elsa, luister dan!

"Stille nacht, heilige nacht." Een zuivere basstem, die tot in de verste hoeken van de kerk klinkt. Geen woord, geen noot verkeerd. Dan loopt Jan zo maar naar het kribje en neemt het op met zijn sterke arm en legt het in de holte van zijn zwakke arm. Nu staat hij onder de ster, en nu pas kan Elsa zien dat het ernstige gezicht dat soms zo boos kijkt, helemaal straalt, net als de ster boven hem!

De hoofdleidster zegt zachtjes: "Dat was zo mooi, Jan, kun je nog een vers zingen?" "Ik weet niet meer versjes," zegt Jan, "alleen dat van 'Stille nacht' ... ja, ik ken nog een ander liedje, maar het is geen Kerstlied." "Slaap, kindje slaap"

Niemand lacht. Zacht zingend ziet hij neer op het lege kribje dat wiegt in zijn arm. Het is Jans geloofsbelijdenis, iedereen voelt dat! Jan brengt het kribje terug en neemt Elsa's hand. Hij leidt haar naar de bank waar ze samen zaten. En Elsa hoort hem fluisteren, "Kan dat nu zo maar gebeuren? Elsa, mijn Elsa, ik denk dat ik nu Jezus liefheb!"

Een jaar later, na het overwinnen van een heleboel hindernissen, trouwen Elsa en Jan. In de kerk glimmen de banken. Het tapijt is smetteloos. Alle ramen zijn gewassen. En voor in de kerk glanst

de kerstboom met zijn witte lichtjes. Jan en Elsa kregen een flatje dicht bij het groepstehuis waar de directrice hen elke week zal bezoeken.

De kerk is vol. Vrienden van de Bijbelclubs uit de wijde omgeving zijn gekomen om dit prachtige feest mee te maken. Het middenpad staat vol met rolstoelen. Het wordt een lange dienst! Want onze vrienden ..., ze zingen zo graag

"O Kindeke klein ... dat kwam voor kleine en grote kinderen. Dat kwam voor ons allemaal!!"

Herman de Jong woont in Jordan Station, Ontario.

Ik wou ...

Ik wou een sterreke te zijn,
een sterreke heel klein.
Ik kroop door een spleetje van het dak
om dicht bij 't Kindeke te zijn.

Ik wou een pijltje gras te zijn,
een sprieteltje zeer fijn.
Ik hing mij aan een herdermantel vast,
om dicht bij 't Kindeke te zijn.

Ik wou een zucht te zijn,
een zuchtje van fluweel of van satijn.
Ik hing mij in St. Jozefs baard,
om dicht bij 't Kindeke te zijn.

Ik wou een linnendoek te zijn,
een draad ervan haarfijn.
Dan wikkelde Maria mij,
om dicht bij 't Kindeke te zijn.

Ik wou een wierookgeur te zijn,
een geur voornaam en fijn.
Dan nam een Magiër mij mee,
om dicht bij 't Kindeke te zijn.

Meer dan dit alles ben ik,
al ben ik nog zo klein:
Dat ik geroepen wordt bij de krib,
om dicht bij 't Kindeke te zijn.

Basiel De Craene
Uit: VIW blad

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- A weekday evening or Sunday morning Bible Hour class for our special needs people in your church or community.

WHO ARE OUR SPECIAL NEEDS PEOPLE?

- Persons of worth and value, created in the image of God.
- Persons whose spiritual needs are often overlooked.
- Persons with a condition, not an illness — mentally limited.
- Persons who too must hear the gospel message.

WHAT ARE THEIR CHARACTERISTICS?

- often have physical disabilities
- have varying degrees of physical, social, mental skills
- are child-like in attitude and action
- are openly loving, trusting, honest, appreciative, sensitive
- are easily influenced
- want to be accepted and included
- need to love and be loved

WHY A SPECIAL CLASS FOR THEM?

- They are eager to learn from God's Word at their level of comprehension.
- They can and do accept Bible truths and so are capable of making personal spiritual decisions.



WHAT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY?

- to give them the opportunity to know and to respond to the love and grace of Jesus Christ.
- to guide them in living out this love in a daily practical way.
- to provide friendship and fellowship.

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN A FRIENDSHIP BIBLE HOUR?

- singing, using visualized or signed language songs and choruses.
- visualized Bible stories, stressing simple, clear Bible truths.
- one-to-one friendships.
- individual sessions: each teacher meets with his or her own student to reinforce the Bible lesson with conversation and lesson-related activities.
- a social time with refreshments, conversation, and fellowship for the entire group (and family members).

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- Written in a step-by-step format.
- Designed to be used in a group setting, as a joint effort of several local churches.
- ONE-TO-ONE TEACHING.

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Coquitlam
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